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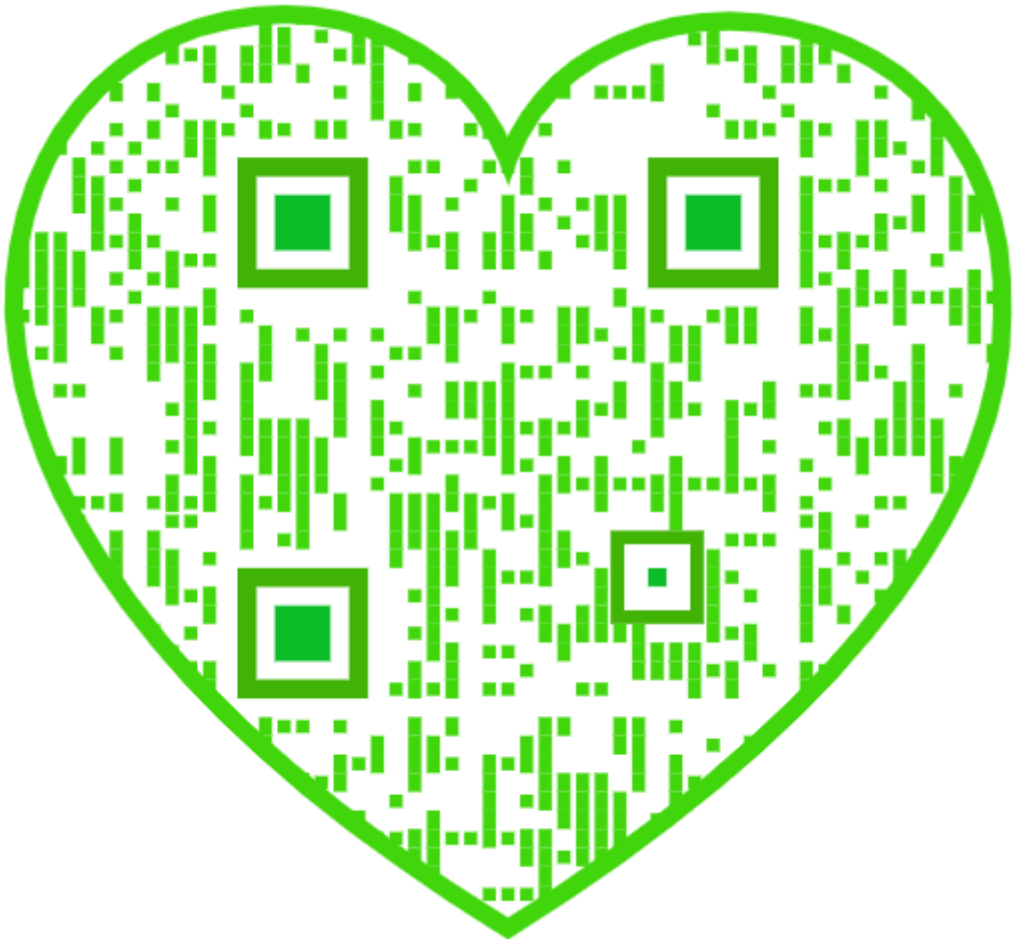

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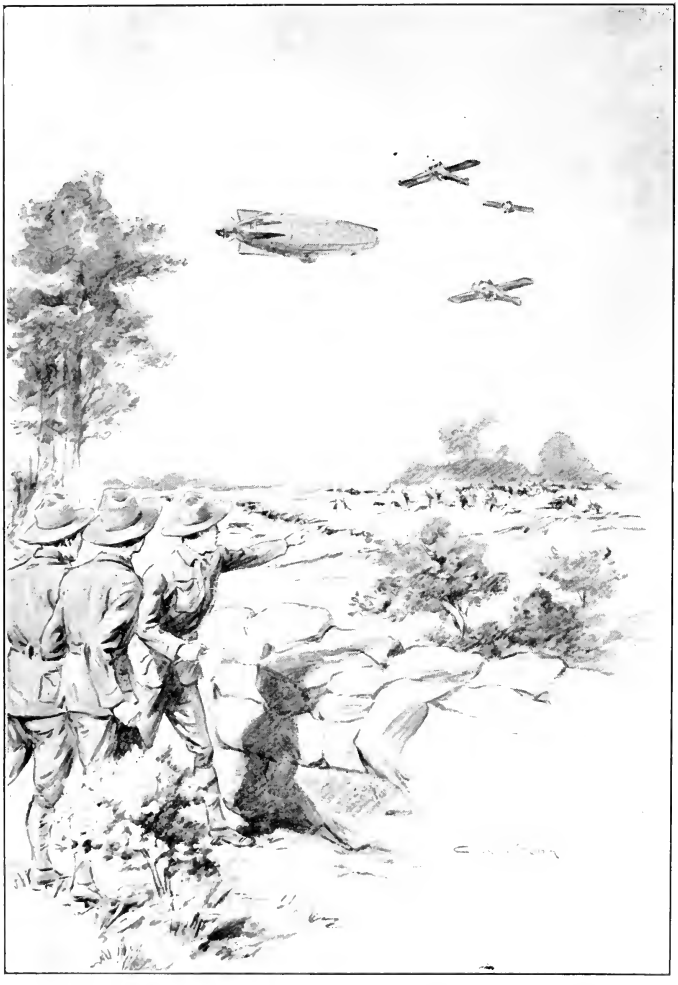

The long roll of rifle firing in volleys, and the faint cheers of charging men.—*Page* 178.

THE BOY SCOUTS ON BELGIAN BATTLEFIELDS

BY

LIEUT. HOWARD PAYSON [pseud.]

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ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES L. WRENN

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The Boy Scouts on Belgian Battlefields.

CHAPTER I.

ANTWERP, ON THE SCHELDT.

"Oh! how glad I am that part of the trip is over, now we've crossed from England to Antwerp without being wrecked!"

"You certainly did seem to have a bad time of it, Tubby, in the wash of the Channel!"

"Bad time did you say, Rob? It was a great deal worse than anything we struck on the voyage between New York and Liverpool, let me tell you."

"But now we want to forget all our troubles of the past, Tubby."

"I know what you mean by that, Merritt; it's just the same as telling me the worst is yet to come."

"Well, I'm a little afraid myself that's go-

ing to turn out a fact. Here we are, just landed in a strange country that is being overrun by an army of German invaders; and all of us are bound to push deeper and deeper into the mire."

"Hey, Merritt, you give me a shiver when you say that, don't you know?"

"I guess you must mean a quiver, Tubby; because whenever you laugh or tremble you make me think of a bowl full of jelly!"

"Now you're making sport of me because I'm so pudgy and fat. Just as if I could help that; can I, Rob?"

"To be sure you couldn't, Tubby; and we wouldn't want you to be anything but what you are—the best natured scout in the whole Eagle Patrol, and I'm safe in saying you're the only fellow in the Long Island town of Hampton who hasn't an enemy. Everybody takes a fancy to a jolly rolypoly like you, Tubby."

"What would we do without you?" Merritt added, with real feeling in his voice.

"Well, but it strikes me you tried mighty hard to induce me not to join you two on this won-

derful trip abroad," complained the fat boy reproachfully.

"There was a good reason for that, Tubby," defended Merritt quickly. "I could see that with all these Old World countries in a scrap, my job of finding that man who is wanted so badly by my grandfather might take me into the fighting zone. Now Rob, as the leader of the Eagle Patrol, volunteered to stand by me, and I gladly accepted his assistance. When you asked to go along I was afraid the hardships of the trip might be too much for one of your peculiar build. That's all, I give you my word for it, Tubby."

"My 'peculiar build,' as you call it, Merritt," chuckled the other, considerably mollified by the explanation offered, "has gotten me into a peck of trouble, I admit. But you never saw me show the white feather, did you?"

"Never, Tubby!" admitted the boy addressed, who was a rather thoughtful looking young chap, of athletic build, though possibly not quite the equal of Rob Blake, the leader of the scout patrol to which all of them belonged. "It was

mighty good of you two to back me up when I'd decided to take the risk alone. But unless that precious paper can be recovered, my grandfather, you know, stands to lose what he says is an enormous amount of money."

"He's got plenty in reserve, I understand, Merritt," observed Blake. "What a grand thing that turned out for your folks when Grandfather Merritt, who had cut your dad out of his will many years ago after he married against his wishes, repented of his cruelty, and paid you an unexpected visit to get acquainted. Little did you think, when you stood up for that old fellow who was being snowballed so unmercifully by a bunch of village boys, that it was your own grandfather."

"Yes," added Tubby, "you know they say a good action is never thrown away. That's why I'm always watching for my opportunities. Some day I hope to win the admiration of a crank millionaire who should, of course, make me his heir."

"Well, here we are landed in Antwerp, and with a lot of sights to gather in before we set out in the direction of Brussels to find your man.

Every minute counts, so let's get busy, and begin to wander around."

"That's right, Rob," said Merritt. "Suppose you lead the way."

These boys, who were all dressed in the well-known khaki that distinguishes scouts in nearly every country of the world, had just landed from a steamer that reached Antwerp from the shores of England.

They had managed to get themselves and few belongings conveyed to a fair hotel by means of a vehicle drawn by a broken-down horse; all of the best animals as well as such automobiles as were deemed worth taking having been commandeered by the Government for cavalry, field and artillery purposes.

While Rob Blake and his two chums, Tubby Hopkins and Merritt Crawford, are thus starting out to secure their first view of the quaint Flanders city, we may take occasion to glance back and see who they are and what they have done.

Those who have had the pleasure of reading previous volumes of this series need no further

introduction to the trio; but for the benefit of any who are now making their acquaintance for the first time, a few paragraphs may not come in amiss.

There were other patrols in the Hampton Troop, but as the Eagles had been first in the field, the members of this organization were looked upon as the pioneers of the scout movement in that part of Long Island.

Rob filled the post of patrol leader, and had, on one occasion, even occupied the position of assistant scout-master, being fully qualified for the certificate he had received from Scout Headquarters in New York City.

Merritt, the second in command, filled the position of corporal. Tubby thus far seemed content to remain just a scout, though he had, by dint of hard labor managed to climb into the first grade rank.

Until recently, Merritt's folks had been in just ordinary circumstances. His father was said to be the best wheelwright in the eastern end of the island, and by constant labor kept his little fam-

ily housed and clothed, and perhaps laid up a little for a rainy day.

Merritt always knew there was some sort of a family skeleton around, and that he had a severe old grandfather somewhere far away; but beyond that he had never been able to probe.

One day, near the end of the preceding winter, had come the singular little incident that wound up in a joyful reunion. Merritt, as one of his chums chanced to remark a little further back in this story, had come upon several village roughs engaged in battering a stranger in town, a little old gentleman who, carrying his grip and finding the hacks all away from the station, had evidently attempted to walk to the hotel.

The cowardly assault aroused the indignation of Merritt, who was a manly boy at all times. He remonstrated with the assailants, and when they continued to pelt the old man, he proceeded to attack them. Whether he could have won out alone and unaided will always be an open question. Fortunately one of the town policemen chanced to come in sight, which event caused the three foes to vanish in hot haste.

Then imagine the astonishment of Merritt when, after giving the old gentleman his name at the other's urgent request, he found himself being hugged by the stranger. He announced himself as Merritt's repentant grandfather who, unable to keep up his bitter feud longer, had sought the forgiveness of his son.

Just what came up later to start these three boys across the water during vacation time, when the Old World was commencing to rock and heave in the throes of the most terrible war ever known, will be made clear as the story progresses.

The first volume in the series, *The Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol,* was necessarily confined to the activities of the young organization; but Rob and his mates met and overcame many difficulties that are well worth reading about.

In the second volume, *The Boy Scouts on the Range,* were recounted a series of strange adventures that befell some of the Eagles during a visit to the Far Southwest, where they took part in the wild life of a cattle ranch.

Through the pages of *The Boy Scouts and*

the Army Airship the reader will find that Rob and his comrades always bore themselves manfully, no matter the emergency; and that they scrupulously observed "scout law" under any and every occasion, as every true wearer of the khaki makes it a point to do.

After this, followed an account of many remarkable happenings that befell the Eagles when under canvas. *The Boy Scouts' Mountain Camp* has deservedly been reckoned one of the very best scout books ever published for boys, and those who own a copy are likely to read it many times.

Once more, chance allowed some of the leading characters in the Hampton Troop to come in touch with Government officers who were experimenting with a wonderfully designed submarine. It happened that Rob and his friends were enabled to assist Uncle Sam's agents in defeating the plans of foreign spies who tried to steal the design of the new invention. In the pages of *The Boy Scouts for Uncle Sam* are recorded the adventures that accompanied their service,

as well as mention of the reward following their victory.

It was a happy chance that allowed some of the boys to pay a visit to the then uncompleted Panama Canal. While in the Canal Zone they again demonstrated that they were always wide-awake and devoted to the service of their country. Much useful information will also be found between the covers of this volume, called *The Boy Scouts at the Panama Canal.*

Once more, Rob and several of his close adherents were unexpectedly allowed to take a trip. Andy Bowles, the bugler of the troop, had an uncle who owned a cattle ranch down in Chihuahua, in Mexico. He was sick, and unable to go down himself to dispose of the stock before the fighting forces of rebels and Federals drove the herds away. Accordingly, he sent his nephew and several of his chums to seek General Villa, whom he had once befriended, and gain his assistance in selling the valuable stock. The wonderful things they saw, and the peculiar adventures that came their way, have all been described in the seventh

volume, just preceding this, under the title of *The Boy Scouts Under Fire in Mexico.*

That, telling briefly some of the remarkable things that happened in their career as Boy Scouts, will have to suffice to introduce Rob and his two chums to the reader.

Starting out from their hotel, the three American boys were soon engrossed in their pursuit of seeing some of the strange sights for which this old Flemish city on the Scheldt has always been famous.

While they gazed, and made many amusing comments, Rob could not help noticing that, in turn, they attracted considerable attention. He could give a good guess as to the reason of this.

At that time, with the vast German army spreading out over most of Belgium, and also fighting its way to Paris, the good people of Antwerp were constantly worried over the possibility of an attack. They had many scares, though as yet the invaders, after taking Brussels, had not chosen to invest the big city near the sea. Later on, as we all know, the time came when their heavy artillery was turned on the forts of Ant-

werp, and before the terrible fire from those colossal German guns, steel domes that had been called invulnerable were easily battered to pulp.

With the assault and fall of Antwerp we have nothing to do, at least at present; but possibly those Flemish people thought the Boy Scouts part of an English army coming to defend Antwerp.

When Rob and his two chums landed from England, after crossing on a small steamer, they found the city choked with fugitives and Belgian soldiers.

Pushing their way along the crowded sidewalks, the boys took in all the sights that were so new to their American eyes. Only Rob had a small smattering of French, while his companions could not speak a word of the language. All of them were utterly ignorant of Flemish, current in half the homes of Belgium.

The way in which the natives made use of sturdy-looking dogs, harnessed in small carts, and trained to do their duty in order to earn their keep, was perhaps the most interesting thing that held their attention.

"Why," remarked Merritt, "they use dogs for

nearly everything. Dozens of milk peddlers have teams to drag their big brass cans around. Then there are the hucksters, like we have over in New York, only these fellows peddle from carts drawn by dogs. We saw one poor, four-footed wretch roped to a treadmill, and doing the family churning; so I guess Belgium must make the dog traffic pay right well."

"And think of dogs drawing a quick-firing gun, which we saw in that street where the soldiers were getting ready to go to the front!" exclaimed Tubby. "I think that was the queerest sight ever."

"I can plainly see," Rob told them, "that while we're over here we are bound to keep our eyes wide open all the time because there are so many things that strike us as being queer just because we've been used to other ways. These people would stare at many of the things we think are common."

"What are you looking at now, Tubby?" asked Merritt, seeing that the boy, who had gained his name because after a fashion he resembled a tub of butter, was in the act of stretching his fat neck

in order to see something that had attracted his attention.

"Why, I was wondering what made all the people crook their necks like that, and look up in the air. Is there a German Zeppelin heaving in sight? I don't seem to glimpse any big dirigible up there; do you, fellows?"

"What's that moving along away up near the clouds?" demanded Merritt.

"It must be an aëroplane," said Tubby. "I just heard somebody say my name close by; but he pointed up at that flier. What could he have meant, Rob?"

"I think I can tell you," replied the other scout. "German aëroplanes are called Taubes, and it sounded like your name. They say that is an aëroplane spy up there!"

CHAPTER II.

THE AERIAL MAP-MAKER.

"He's flying pretty high, let me tell you," said Tubby, straining his neck in an endeavor to watch the evolutions of the far-distant object sailing on the border of the cloud, and which looked so much like a great bird with outstretched wings.

"And all the while he is using his powerful field-glass to watch things going on below," added Rob. "I wouldn't be surprised if those chaps make a rough map, as they go over a place, with the position of forts marked, and the disposition of troops. In this war they say aëroplanes and dirigibles are going to play great stunts."

"Think of the nerve of that German aviator, sailing right over Antwerp in broad daylight!" Tubby declared. "It's a dare, all right, and I wonder if any of these Belgian fliers will take him up. I really think I'd like to see a little scrap

up in the air. We didn't have a chance for anything of that sort since we were down in Mexico with Villa."

"Well," returned Merritt, "you may see more of that kind of business over here than you want. These fliers don't go circling around just to spy on the enemy. In lots of cases they have another and more terrible mission."

"Oh!" ejaculated the fat scout uneasily, "now you're thinking of that visit paid by a Zeppelin to Antwerp a short time back when it dropped a bomb that smashed things to flinders. They say it was aimed at the king's palace. But you don't think now that fellow away up there in the clouds would bother dropping explosives on our heads, do you, Rob?"

Tubby always appealed to the patrol leader when bothered about anything. To hear him talk you would imagine that he considered Rob Blake a walking encyclopedia, and capable of answering any kind of question.

"No, he's flying too high for that," the other told him confidently. "You see, with the air currents, that we know something about ourselves,

no one at that height could count on landing his explosive anywhere near the place he wanted it to go. Chances are that chap is only out on a spying trip. Aëroplane pilots are the scouts of the air these days, you understand. Nothing can be hidden from them."

"I understand," ventured Merritt, as they continued to watch the circling of the lofty observer and map-maker, "that there can be no surprises in this war, because the enemy always knows all about the massing of troops long before an attack can be delivered. An eagle or a hawk, hovering over shallow water, can see every bit of bottom when the surface is still, and so he's able to pounce down on the fish he's selected for dinner. These wonderful air-pilots will bring information of every contemplated move on the part of the enemy."

"Poor old Napoleon would be a back number in these days," Tubby sighed, "because you remember his strongest card was to divide the enemy, and then smash one army and then the other. They'd know all about his game in time to block

it. The romance of war has gone glimmering, I'm afraid."

"Listen to all that shouting," said Merritt.

"Seems to be cheers, as well as these people can cheer, which is not like the good old United States way," Tubby commented.

"You can see what it means," remarked Rob. "There goes a Belgian biplane up, to get after the bold German!"

"My stars!" gasped Tubby. "Now we *will* see a circus! Think of two rival pilots maneuvering up there among the clouds, and trying to knock each other out! Whew! But watch him boring up in spirals, would you? Does the German see him, do you think, and is he beginning to skip out?"

"Nothing like that has happened yet, as far as I can see," admitted Rob. "There he starts around again, as if meaning to complete his map, no matter if a dozen Belgian or English airmen come up after him."

"It'll be a fight, then, see if it doesn't!" Tubby affirmed.

"There goes a second aëroplane, and this time

a monoplane," Merritt told them, pointing as he spoke. "Unless I miss my guess, there's an English aviator in that machine. It doesn't carry the little Belgian flag the other does, you notice."

"Two against one," muttered the deeply interested Tubby. "Better be making up your mind to turn tail and run, Mr. Deutschland. The odds are against you, and, if you should get tumbled out of your seat a mile high, I'd hate to be under you when you strike the ground."

"They seem to be maneuvering for position," asserted Rob. "Yes, both are circling around now, and going still higher all the time. Before long the German will be hidden in that cloud bank, and that's what he's aiming to have happen."

"I thought I saw something like a little puff of smoke just then!" declared Merritt, who had exceptionally good eyes, strong almost as those of an eagle.

"Then they must be bombarding each other!" Tubby ventured to say, evidently greatly thrilled by the spectacle that could never have been dreamed of a few generations back.

"It's likely they are using their automatics, and trying to disable each other," admitted Rob, "though, between us, Merritt, I don't believe the tiny puff of smoke could be seen away down here, unless you had a strong glass. Of course, when moving as fast as they do, the chance of making a shot tell is next door to nix."

"Anyhow, they're chasing the German aëroplane off," Tubby declared. "That is the main object for the brave Belgians going up there."

The boys had made up their minds while on the way across that as Americans they must obey the President's appeal and be strictly neutral, if it were possible. They had many good friends who were of German descent, while others had English ancestors and near relatives.

The one country with which they sympathized deeply was Belgium. The stubborn and heroic way in which that seven millions of people had defied seventy millions, and the gallant manner in which their little army had tried to resist the invasion of their beloved country, had aroused the admiration of every one of the scouts.

As they stood there on that afternoon, and

watched, they finally saw the German Taube vanish in the clouds, with the leading Belgian aëroplane following suit. Whether the pursuer ever overtook the foreign air-scout or not, the boys never learned.

"Well, that was a lively little tilt while it lasted," remarked Merritt as, the entertainment being over, the crowds again commenced sauntering back and forth, with everybody talking volubly about the spectacle in the heavens.

Soldiers gave them a curious look in passing. Every stranger in Antwerp was under more or less suspicion in those days, for it was becoming known that the German secret service had for years maintained the most wonderful system of spying in France, England and Belgium ever dreamed of. Antwerp had thousands of Teuton residents before the war, some of them leading merchants who owned splendid country places six or seven miles outside the city, where solid cement tennis courts afterward came in very handy as foundations for the immense German siege guns.

"We'll see plenty more things that will give us

a thrill to beat that," Rob observed, pushing through the bustling, chattering crowds.

"Yes, and I'm afraid times may come when danger will hang over our heads," Merritt pursued, with a touch of regret in his voice. "Then you'll both be sorry you didn't let me go off on this wild goose chase, as it may turn out to be, by myself."

"What do you take us for, I want to know?" demanded Rob. "Haven't we been through all sorts of tough times together in the past; and why shouldn't we stand by our chum when he needs our help? What's a scout good for if he is ready to desert a comrade when the sky grows dark? That's just the time to show his true colors."

"You're taking the very words out of my mouth when you say that, Rob!" asserted Tubby valiantly. "No matter what happens, we're bound by the ties of old friendship. We'll sink or swim together, boys. And Merritt, please don't ever tell us again you're feeling sorry for letting us come along."

"If that man is to be found, we're going to

corner him!" declared Rob, with his lips taking on the firm lines that marked them whenever he was making up his mind to hammer away persistently, like Grant did before Richmond; "and when we go back to the other side, we hope to be carrying that precious old paper your grandfather let get out of his possession in such a queer way."

"This seems like a pretty warm day to me, even for summer," observed Tubby irrelevantly.

"Now, we can give a pretty good guess, Rob," ventured Merritt smilingly, "that Tubby has a sly meaning back of that remark."

"Yes," added the patrol leader, "and the chances are three to one it has something to do with feeding."

"You are champion guessers, both of you," Tubby informed them, without seeming to be in the least ashamed of the confession. "I'm consumed by a violent thirst right now; and I bet you the milk in that shiny brass can that those two tired dogs have been dragging all over Antwerp this afternoon will have a lump of ice in it. Anyway, I'm going to test it; come along and let me stand treat."

Laughing at his earnestness, the others followed the fat scout across the street, where the old woman with her dog team was apparently resting, and observing the remarkably interesting sights around her.

Just then there were loud cheers that attracted the attention of the three boys.

"Something else coming along that's worth seeing," Merritt announced. "Better curb that fierce thirst of yours for a minute or two, Tubby, while we watch what's passing."

"Oh! well, I guess the milk won't sour while we're waiting," admitted the fat boy with a sigh of resignation, as he wheeled so as to face the street.

"What do you call that, I wonder?" remarked Merritt, as he looked. "It's got the wheels of an automobile; but say, notice how the body of the car has been built up with steel sides, will you? And as sure as you live there's a quick firing Maxim mounted behind that bullet shield."

"Now I know what it is," Rob hastened to say.

"Then tell us, please," urged Tubby helplessly.

"They call them armored cars," said the patrol leader. "I've read about how some of these reckless Belgians have fitted up cars in this way. Nearly every day they start out to raid through the country, where they expect to run across detachments of Uhlans, or bicycle squads of the German advance. Then they dart down on them and do some terrible work; before the enemy can recover to smash them, they are off like a flash, and return to town with all sorts of trophies."

"They must have just been coming in," ventured Merritt. "I saw one of the soldiers had a bandage around his head. Another was holding up two helmets which must have been worn by Uhlans. And listen how the crowds roar and cheer. They certainly do hate the Kaiser and his army in Antwerp."

"Well, do you wonder?" Rob asked. "After some of their lovely towns have been burnt down, and thousands of houses destroyed, simply because these Belgians dared to stand up for their rights as a neutral nation!"

"Well, how about that drink of milk, fellows?" Tubby wanted to know.

"Suit yourself, Tubby," Rob told him. "If it tastes good to you, we might join you in a glass."

"Huh! sort of 'trying it on the dog first,' eh?" Tubby retorted, and then turning toward the owner of the dog team and the milk cart, he made a gesture with his head, and held up three fingers.

Evidently the old woman must have understood what he meant, though she looked a bit "peeved," as Tubby afterward expressed it, at being asked to do a retail business. There were a number of measures dangling from hooks around the top of the shining brass milk can, also several glass "schooners." Taking one of the latter the old Belgian milk vender was in the act of filling it from the contents of the can when something astonishing happened.

Four soldiers who had been passing became excited, and pointed at the group; then they laid violent hands on the owner of the milk cart!

CHAPTER III.

LEAVING FOR THE FRONT.

"What's this? What's this?" stammered Tubby, as the schooner of rich milk fell with a crash to the pavement when the soldiers began struggling with the woman vender, who was also the owner of the dog team.

Of course a crowd collected immediately, as it always will in a city when there is the first sign of something doing. Antwerp was fairly seething with half suppressed excitement at that time, and anything of this kind was like putting a match to the powder magazine.

"Well, I declare but she's a husky old woman, that's right!" Tubby was heard to say after his astonishment had in a measure abated, and he could catch his breath. "Why, it takes the whole four soldiers to subdue her. Shame! to hit a poor old woman like that; but my stars, don't she

kick and try to land a blow on some of their noses."

"Whew! what do you think!" exclaimed Rob just then, for he had been listening to some of the chattering on the part of the excited crowd near by. "It isn't an old woman, after all, but a man. That explains how he comes to fight as he does, and why the Belgians keep on treating him so roughly."

"A man, and dressed up like a woman!" cried Tubby. "Well, if that isn't a queer stunt, I want to know. Is he trying to escape military duty, do you think, Rob? I remember they have conscription here in Belgium just like in Germany, Russia and France. Every young fellow has to serve the colors just so long."

But Rob shook his head. By now the soldiers had apparently conquered the spirit of the man in woman's garments. His white Belgian cap had been torn off in the struggle, showing that his hair was short underneath. He was also bleeding from having come in contact with some hard object, but he now stood there as straight

as any grenadier, and looked his captors contemptuously in the face.

"They say he's a German spy!" Rob told his two chums. Tubby again held his breath, and stared as hard as he could at the prisoner.

The crowd became fairly wild to get at the captive, and made all manner of violent threats as they surged around the little group. The milk can was upset, and the dogs liberated by some friendly hand ran wildly away, as though knowing that their temporary master had gotten himself in a serious scrape.

The four determined Belgian soldiers guarding their prisoner against the fury of the mob began to work a way along the pavement, meaning, no doubt, to land their prize in the lock-up, where he would be safe until the firing squad was called on to complete the tragedy.

Presently their signals brought another detachment of the guard to the spot, a way was speedily cleared through the dense masses of people, and that was the last the three scouts saw of the spy. They could guess his fate, but at the same

time felt positive that he must have met it as a man.

Somehow, the experience gave them a queer feeling. Here they had been rubbing up against some of the tragic happenings of the war, and after being in Antwerp only a few hours. No wonder they all felt convinced that the signs pointed to their having some lively times ahead.

"And say, I didn't get my drink of milk, either, did I?" lamented Tubby, after things settled back into the old rut again, with that never-ending procession of citizens, refugees, soldiers, and even a sprinkling of venturesome foreign tourists passing by in both directions.

"Oh! that doesn't cut much figure in the matter," Merritt told him, "because if you step off this main street into one of the side *gassens* you'll run across plenty of other milk-venders, who will not turn out to be something else."

"I see one right now," announced the persistent Tubby, who did not like to give up anything on which he had set his heart. "And look at the name of the same, will you: *The Street of*

the Steen. Now what does that stand for, Rob? Is it the same as the German word *stein?"*

"Oh! no, you're away off there, Tubby," he was immediately told by the patrol leader, who had studied his guide book to some advantage. "This Steen used ages ago to be a terrible prison, where in the days of the Spanish Inquisition they tortured people in all sorts of ways. Just now it's a great museum; and if only we had time, which we don't expect, I'd like nothing better than to explore it."

"You see," Merritt told them, "if only you would let me go on by myself, and try to find Steven Meredith, you might stay around here and have a fairly decent time, unless the Germans do really start to try and capture Antwerp, after all."

"That'll do for you, Merritt," Rob informed him severely, "you forget that incident is closed."

"Yes," added Tubby, trying to frown, but as usual making a sorry mess of it, for the lines of his chubby face refused to take on such an air, seeing that they were only adapted for smiling, "don't let us hear another wheeze from you,

Merritt. But please come with me, and let's see if all the old milk-venders of Antwerp are German spies. I hope the milk isn't poisoned."

"That isn't fair talk, Tubby, because you know the Germans would be away and above doing anything like that. They have their faults, but nobody calls them cowards. In fact, they seem to be too brave for their own good, because we hear how they are shot down like ripe grain, pushing along in masses straight into the jaws of death, and singing as they go."

This time they were allowed to quaff their mugs of cool, fresh milk without any unpleasant incident to interrupt the ceremony. Tubby did eye the woman who owned the outfit rather suspiciously, and must have aroused her curiosity by the way he turned his head several times after they had walked off.

For another hour the three American scouts tramped back and forth, seeing all they possibly could in so short a time. The quaint Flemish houses, with their many gables, and their red-tiled roofs, interested them greatly. In some of the streets the buildings even seemed to lean

toward one another, and Tubby declared two men could almost shake hands by stretching from the upper windows.

"Now we ought to see the burgomaster," said Rob, as the afternoon waned. "You know you are carrying a letter to him, Merritt, from your grandfather, who happens to be acquainted with him. And we count on getting a guide through his influence who will take us along the roads between here and Brussels."

"Even if a guide is not to be found, because nearly all the men are enlisted in the army," Merritt replied, "we've made up our minds not to hold back. Fellows who have had as much experience in running the gauntlet as the scouts of the Eagle Patrol can point to, needn't worry about how they're going to get along."

"Leave that to us," said Tubby, rather pompously; "and we'll land on our feet all right, just as a cat does if you drop it out of the second-story window."

After considerable difficulty, the boys were admitted to an audience with the mayor or burgomaster of Antwerp in his official chambers. For-

tunately, he spoke English, so they expected to meet with little difficulty in acquainting him with the nature of their mission to Belgium at a time when nearly all other Americans were only too well pleased to get away from the land of strife and warfare.

The burgomaster looked surprised and even anxious when he heard that they desired an official paper from him, requesting all Belgians to assist them in their search for one Steven Meredith, who was believed to be located in a town not many miles to the west of the capital.

"I would do much for my old friend, Monsieur Charles Crawford, for whom I have long entertained a sincere affection," he told Merritt, after he had read the letter presented to him, and questioned the boys at length, "but it is a most serious undertaking you have in view. I question the wisdom of my encouraging such a dangerous trip."

Rob, seeing that the good burgomaster appeared to be hesitating, and as Tubby expressed it, "on the fence," started in to talk. Rob had a very persuasive way about him, as his chums

knew from past experiences. They guessed how it would all turn out as soon as they saw how impressed the Belgian city official seemed to be with the arguments the boy brought forward.

Of course, in the end, the burgomaster yielded, and wrote them out the passport they wanted so badly. This document would possibly permit them to go even beyond the lines where the Belgian army was intrenched, waiting to deal a blow at the enemy in case the Germans turned threateningly toward Antwerp.

"I do this much against my will," he told them, as he was shaking each one by the hand upon their leaving. "But my old friend has written me so much that is clever about the faculty you boys have shown in taking care of yourselves, that I am in hopes you may get through safely. But I shall be sad indeed if anything overtakes you through my giving way to sentiment. I wish I could influence you to remain here in safety, and send out some messenger in your stead to bring this man to Antwerp."

"We have made up our minds to accompany our friend, the grandson of the Charles Crawford

you knew, sir," Rob told him, "and all we can promise is that we mean to be very careful. If the man you will send around to us as a guide does his duty faithfully, we hope to get along fairly well. And believe us, sir, we feel that you have advised and assisted us even more generously than Mr. Crawford expected of you. We thank you a thousand times. Good-bye."

That night passed without anything unusual happening to disturb the three boys. Their hotel chanced to be situated in a quiet part of the seething city, so that they were not at all annoyed by patriotic outbursts. And boys as a rule have a happy faculty of losing their troubles in sleep.

With the coming of that next morning all of them were early astir. After breakfast they went in search of mounts, having secured some hints from the proprietor of the hotel.

Horses were certainly at a high premium just then in Flanders. Nearly every animal of any worth at all had been taken by the Belgian field forces for army use. If a few were by accident hidden, and escaped this search, they were apt to be discovered by the advancing Germans.

"It would be of no use, anyway, getting hold of respectable nags," Rob explained, when he saw even Tubby gape at sight of the poor looking animals they had offered to them at exorbitant prices, "because we'd never have the least chance to get anywhere on their backs. No matter how many passes we had from burgomasters, or even King Albert himself, somebody would be sure to take them away from us."

"I suppose half a loaf *is* better than no bread at all," complained Merritt with vivid recollections of the fine mounts he and his chums had sported on several occasions, notably when on the cattle ranch, and following Mexican war trails.

"But *such* a loaf!" sighed Tubby, as he ran his hand over the bony back of the nearest quadruped, and wondered whether so weak looking a horse could long survive under his rather heavy weight.

"They may turn out a heap better than they look," Rob told them. "Sometimes it's the bony horses that can hold the pace in a grueling jour-

ney. But, after all, it's a case of Hobson's choice with us; either these nags, or walk."

"Whew! better close the bargain then, Merritt; that is, if you think you can afford the price," Tubby hastened to say, for as may be easily understood, he was not very much in love with protracted walks, not having been built for a sprinter.

So Merritt bought four horses, and paid cash down for them, receiving a regular bill of sale from the dealer, to show they were his property. With them went old saddles and bridles, good enough for the purpose of the three scouts, but not of a type calculated to incite anyone to steal the same.

All that remained to be looked after now was that promised guide. If the good burgomaster of Antwerp kept his promise, they expected to find a native waiting at the hotel when they got back after their foray into the limited horse market.

And sure enough they found a swarthy Belgian there who said he had been engaged by the mayor to serve them. Merritt quickly made terms, for the guide, besides being able to converse in French

and Flemish, could speak some English, and readily comprehended all that was said in that tongue; especially when the subject of a money contract came under consideration.

"There's nothing to detain us any longer, boys," remarked Merritt. "We have made up a little pack apiece which we'd like to take along. We travel light on this trip, you know; all but Tubby, and that's something he always gets left on. The balance of our duffle the proprietor of the hotel has promised to keep safely until we show up to claim it again."

"Small loss if we never see any of it again," Rob admitted. "At the same time we hope to come back this way after we've run that person down, and either recover the paper your grandfather wants, or learn that it's lost for good."

"That is," corrected Tubby, "we expect to see Antwerp again if the Germans don't gobble us up."

"I'd like to see them try it," remarked Merritt, with a significant look at the ample proportions of the fat chum. "They'd have their work cut out, as sure as you live, Tubby."

"Now, don't get personal again, Merritt," cautioned the other, holding up a warning forefinger, "but as there are heaps and heaps of queer things I'd like to poke into around this town, I certainly hope to visit it again."

Half an hour afterward, mounted on scrubby looking horses, which would have excited the derision of any respectable cowboy in the West, Rob and his two chums, accompanied by Anthony Wallenhout, the Belgian guide, passed out of the city, heading toward the east.

Before they had gone a sixth of a mile they found themselves stopped by a patrol of soldiers, led by a young lieutenant, who, it happened, could speak English.

"It is no use, messieurs," he told them, with a pleasant smile, but a determined shake of the head, "you must face the other way and go back. The enemy is in force in many places between Brussels and Antwerp, and severe fighting is going on wherever our brave army has thrown up entrenchments. Antwerp is the only safe place for any who speak English, these days."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAY OF THE BOY SCOUT.

"Now, wouldn't that jar you!" muttered Tubby, sprawled on the back of his horse very much after the manner of a great toad. "Here we hardly get started on our wonderful trip over the battlefields of Belgium before we're held up, and told to fade away. Huh! talk to me about luck, we seem to have lost our grip."

"Show him what you've got, Merritt," suggested Rob, who did not give up quite so easily, because of a sudden snag in the stream.

"Oh! why, yes, how about that passport the burgomaster wrote out for us himself? It ought to do the trick!" exclaimed Tubby, his sad look disappearing like a flash, and an expectant one appearing in its stead.

The officer scanned the paper which Merritt handed him.

"At a time like this the burgomaster himself is under military orders," he told the waiting boys, "and if it happened to be a matter of much importance I could not honor his request. It chances, however, that in this case there is nothing involved except your safety. And you seem to be willing to take the risk?"

"Yes, because we have a very important piece of business to carry out," Rob hastened to tell him, seeing which way the wind was blowing, and wishing to take advantage of the flood-tide. "It means a great deal to one of my friends if we can find a certain man. You will allow us to go on, then, I hope?"

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders in real French style as he handed the burgomaster's passport back.

"Yes, if you are that rash, young messieurs," he said. "We, of the Belgian army, can admire pluck. You certainly have my best wishes."

"Oh! thank you, lieutenant!" gushed Tubby,

who was relieved to know that the enterprise was not fated to be condemned at the start.

Perhaps the time might come ere long when the same Tubby would be secretly lamenting over the fact that it had been given a free swing. But coming events do not always cast their shadows before; and just at that moment none of the venturesome scouts could so much as guess what awaited them in the disturbed country beyond.

They gave the obliging lieutenant a regular scout salute, which he returned in kind. The paper had informed him that Rob and his chums were members of the Boy Scout organization in America, so that the fact of their wearing khaki uniforms was easily understood.

"I hope we have as good luck in skipping past every obstacle we run up against," Merritt was saying, as they moved along the road leading from Antwerp in the direction of the Belgian capital.

"Oh! we mustn't expect to be always as fortunate as that," said Rob. "I believe in hoping for the best, and preparing for the worst. It's good policy all around."

"Something like we read the Pilgrim Fathers used to do in the good old days when they used to ride to church with the wife back of them," Tubby explained, "and every man carrying his gun along. Their motto was 'trust in the Lord; but keep your powder dry!'"

"That's the idea," agreed Rob. "And so far, in all our tramps and wanderings, we've managed to do our part fairly well."

"Let's hope this venture turns out as good," Tubby added, with a side glance toward Merritt, for, of course, it concerned him more than either of the others whether success or failure resulted from their trip abroad.

That was only a beginning, for they were soon held up again. This time it came about that the soldier in charge of the detachment could not speak a word of English, so the guide had to exercise his ability in the line of a translator.

So well did he plead, and explain that they were all good friends of the burgomaster of Antwerp, that once again they were allowed to proceed.

Rob could easily see, however, that consider-

able doubt had arisen in the mind of the officer as to whether he should permit three boys to head into such a disturbed country as that lying beyond.

Like the lieutenant, he shrugged his shoulders, and dismissed the matter of responsibility from his mind. Indeed, there were too many other serious affairs to be considered just then to bother about a party of tourists fairly wild to say they had gazed upon actual battlefields; for, doubtless, he concluded this was the real reason why these venturesome boys elected to take chances in the war zone.

So long as they were not spies in the service of the enemy it was all right; only he wanted to warn them that they were apt to meet with some roving detachment of Germans at almost any time, since they were overrunning most of the country, appearing suddenly at villages, and demanding food and wine, or surprising isolated stations poorly guarded, so as to hold some important bridge for the coming of a column.

"Look what's coming whizzing along ahead

there!" Tubby called out a short time after this encounter.

There was a little cloud of dust, and they could see that it was caused by someone mounted on a bicycle, who was bending down over the handlebars and working his feet very rapidly.

"Give him the road, fellows; he seems to be in a big hurry!" ordered Rob.

A minute later and the bicyclist shot by them. As he did so he straightened up in the saddle, and to their surprise gave them a regulation scout salute. Then he went tearing down the road in that cloud of dust.

"Did you see that?" cried Tubby. "Why, he was a Boy Scout as sure as anything! Now, what in the wide world was he in such a terrible hurry for? He acted like he might be late for his breakfast."

"Just now the Boy Scouts in Belgium have a good many other things to bother them besides missing an occasional meal," explained Rob. "They have been taken over by the military authorities and are doing splendid work in heaps of ways."

"Yes," added Merritt, as they rode on again, "I noticed a number of them while we were in Antwerp, and they seemed to be on the jump constantly. Every fellow had a badge on his left arm with the letters 'S. M.' on it. You remember, Rob, when you asked what they stood for, you were told the letters meant 'Service Militaire,' and showed that the boys were working for the Government."

"What d'ye reckon they find to do?" asked Tubby, deeply interested.

"They act as dispatch bearers," replied Rob, "ambulance orderlies, and aids to the police. They told me that in Brussels, now held by the Germans, some scouts daily herded the women who came for their regular ration issued by the Government, and kept order, too. Everybody takes them seriously. This is no time for play among the Boy Scouts of Belgium, when war has gripped their native land."

"When we were over in England," Merritt related, "I made it a point to find out how all the scouts there were being made use of. It gave me a mighty proud feeling to know that I

was authorized to wear the uniform of the Eagle Patrol; for there never was a time in the history of the world when boys were of as much use as now."

"But there have been no battles on English soil, up to now, Merritt; tell me how the Boy Scouts of Great Britain could do things, then?" asked Tubby, who it seems could not have been bothering himself very much when his chums were making all these observations.

Merritt took a slip of paper from his pocket. They were riding slowly at the time, indeed at all times, for the horses did not seem desirous of making any particular speed.

"Here's an account I clipped from an English paper while we were in London," he told Tubby. "It tells a lot of things the scouts have taken to doing in order to assist; for, during the war, school duties have been mostly dropped."

"Oh! what joy!" cried Tubby; "but go and read it out to us, Merritt."

"Here's what the account says, then," Merritt told them, as he managed to read from the slip: "'Acting as guides to troops. Forward-

ing dispatches dropped from air craft. Coast-guard work, such as watching estuaries, guiding vessels in unbuoyed channels, and showing lights to friendly vessels!' "

"Whew!" remarked Tubby; "that sounds fine to me, Merritt. For once I almost wish I happened to be a Johnny Bull boy instead of an Uncle Sam. Is that all?"

"It's only the beginning," he was told. "Listen to some more work a scout can do for his country over there. 'Collecting information as to available supplies and transports. Helping the families of men at the front. First aid; fitting up nursing stations, refuges, dispensaries, and kitchens in their own club rooms. Carrying on organized relief of the destitute. Guarding and patrolling bridges, culverts, telegraph lines, and water supplies. Serving as dispatch bearers, telegraph and mail delivery riders; and distributing millions of notices as to billeting, commandeering, safety precautions, and the like.' How's that strike you, Tubby?"

"It certainly gives me a thrill," the fat boy replied, "and I envy the lucky Boy Scouts of Great

Britain. I reckon they're doing things like that down in France. Yes, and in Germany too. Now people will see what it means to wear the khaki uniform. I'm prouder than ever because I have that right."

"They say," remarked Rob, chiming in with what knowledge he had picked up, "that for once the boys are appreciated in these times. They have at last come into their own. A scout's uniform is regarded in England as a sign of competence and responsibility. It is treated with the same respect given to any other official garb."

"This account goes on to say that the boys have developed a wonderful topographical knowledge," Merritt continued, full of the subject as any Boy Scout might well be. "They pack ambulances systematically with instruments and medical supplies, checking off their lists like experienced quartermasters. Others take charge of the delivery of camp outfits from the stores to the troops about to embark for the seat of war. The bicycle corps and mounted squads can care for their machines and horses, make high speed, and meet emergencies with decision and

intelligence. The signal corps can use the telegraph key, semaphore, and flags almost as well as veterans, thanks to their training. They can repair telegraph lines and instruments, and have considerable knowledge of wireless."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Tubby. "This is sure the day of the Boy Scout. I never thought I'd ever live to see him climb to such a dazzling height. Of course, over in America, scouts have never been trained with any idea that they might be soldiers; for we don't have a chip on our shoulder all the time, and feel that we're spoiling for a fight."

"All the same," said Rob, "the time may come when what we've learned will be of great use to our country. Besides, every boy is ten times better off for joining the organization."

They had been riding in this fashion for an hour and more, often meeting parties of fugitives on the road, some of them bearing household treasures, leading a mooing cow, or driving a spavined old horse that was attached to a shaky wagon piled up with goods of value to the owners only.

These sights at first struck the boys as pitiful. They would in time become so accustomed to them that such spectacles must be taken as a part of the war game; still, all of them were sure that in this case "familiarity would not breed contempt."

Then at times it happened that houses were scarce, and a stretch of the road, from some reason or other, ahead appeared deserted. Often, in the distance, they heard strange sounds like far-away thunder. It thrilled them to imagine that possibly this was the roar of big guns; perhaps they were even drawing near to an actual battlefield!

About this time the boys noticed that their guide was acting as though excited.

"What's the matter, Anthony?" asked Rob, bent on knowing the worst.

In his broken English the Belgian guide tried to tell them his fears.

"Look you—over thisaways—you see men, horses—they run thisaway, they run thataway —some shake hands at us—I do not know, but it

may be they will turn out to be Uhlan cavalrymen —bad men who ride far in advance of the army, to screen movements of troops. If they are Uhlans, we may not go ahead further!"

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE BRIDGE.

Of course what Anthony told them caused the boys more or less concern. They had no desire to fall into the hands of the Germans. While it could not be said that they were against the invaders, the terrible stories they had heard in Antwerp, even if only a small part were true, gave them an unpleasant feeling toward the Kaiser's men.

That word Uhlan was dreaded by every Belgian or native of Northern France. While it really stands for the cavalry arm of the German forces, still, ever since the Franco-Prussian war of more than forty years ago, it has possessed a terrible significance all its own. Humble peasants shivered when they pronounced it, and no doubt many an unruly child was threatened with the coming of the terrible Uhlans unless it mended its ways.

"If that's the case, then," Merritt voiced the opinion of himself and chums by saying hurriedly, "we want to get out of this. It's a case of either run or hide with us."

"But where could we hide?" asked Tubby, looking all around him helplessly. "Just now there isn't a single cottage in sight; and the bare fields around don't offer much shelter, seems to me."

"There's a bridge just ahead of us," said Rob.

"And we might manage to get our mounts down underneath," added Merritt instantly, grasping the idea that was in the patrol leader's mind. "The bank slopes easy enough to allow of it."

"Eet could be done, Messieurs!" allowed the guide, who was even more alarmed, it seemed, than Tubby himself, since the prospect of falling into the hands of the dreaded Uhlan raiders began to assume greater proportions, now that the peril no longer lay in the dim distance, but was close at hand.

"Then let's hurry and see what it looks like under the bridge," advised Rob.

Just as they figured, it proved easy enough to lead their horses down the bank, which was covered with grass and growing weeds, for since the war began all really unnecessary work on roads and railways had been stopped. And those horses would have willingly gone anywhere if there only seemed a prospect that they might rest a spell, for they seemed tired all of the time.

"Listen to them shouting, will you?" Tubby complained as they were going down amidst the bushes that promised to screen them from the party on the other side of the little stream across which the massive bridge had been built.

"I'm afraid they must have seen us," Merritt said, "and that will mean they'll soon be across the bridge again to find out what we're doing, and who we are. What's the program, Rob?"

"We must act as though our only object in coming down here was to water our horses," replied the patrol leader; this idea having possibly come into his mind as he noticed the way his mount put its ears forward, and commenced to whinny—as horses invariably do when they scent water, and are thirsty.

"Come on, here, what's ailing you, Dobbin?"

demanded Tubby, jerking at the reins when his animal displayed an inclination to hold back.

"He acts kind of queer, doesn't he?" Merritt said when, after considerable fussing, Tubby managed to coax his horse to once more advance, though the animal seemed to be snorting, and trembling. "If we were on the cattle range right now I'd be half inclined to think he smelled a rattler near by."

"My stars! I hope they don't have such pests over here in Belgium!" exclaimed Tubby, beginning to himself show immediate signs of nervousness.

"Not the least danger," declared Rob. "But, all the same, my horse seems trying to hold back, just as yours did, Tubby."

"They're sure a cantankerous lot all through!" grumbled the fat scout, looking carefully where he expected to plant his foot next; for, in spite of Rob's assurance, he was not quite so certain that the undergrowth beneath the bridge might not harbor some poisonous reptile which might strike unexpectedly.

"They're still keeping up that shouting!" an-

nounced Merritt, listening. "Which I take it is a queer thing for them to do. If they're German raiders why don't they come across and interview us, I wonder? I thought I saw uniforms among the bunch. How about that, Rob?"

"The sun was in my eyes, and I couldn't say for certain," acknowledged the one spoken to, jerking at the bridle of his horse.

"One thing is sure," said Tubby, "the horses are not at all thirsty; else there's some thing they don't like about this place down here."

All of them were really puzzled by the strange actions of their horses. It was no longer simply Tubby's mount that acted so contrary, but the other three also.

"Guess my nag got cold feet about something; and it's catching as the measles," Tubby announced, as he shook his head in the manner of one who finds himself with too hard a nut to crack.

"Well, that water looks cool and clear," said Merritt, "and I think I could enjoy a few swallows myself, if the horses won't."

"Sure it ain't poisoned, are you, Merritt?" queried Tubby dubiously.

"Oh! get that crazy notion out of your poor head, Tubby. Germans don't make war that way. They face the music, and stand up before the guns. What makes you look at me like that, Rob?" and Merritt as he asked this question stopped short, for he had been in the act of putting his threat into deeds, and getting down beside the stream to take a drink.

"I smell it too, Rob!" exclaimed Tubby just then. "And, oh! let me tell you it's a rank odor. Isn't it in this country they make all that Limburger cheese; or over the border in Holland? Well, if you asked me I'd say it was something like that."

"Smells more like burnt powder to me!" snapped Rob, showing visible signs of increasing excitement.

With that he commenced looking hurriedly around. Perhaps a sudden tremendous suspicion may have flashed into his mind, and he was seeking to justify it by making some sort of discovery.

The gully was of considerable width, as has

been said before, though just at that time in the late summer the stream that flowed through it did not appear to be of any great depth, and could be easily forded.

There were bushes and grass and weeds growing all about, besides stray stones that may have fallen there when the solid masonry of the really fine bridge had been constructed years before.

Although he turned his eyes in this quarter and that, Rob failed to see anything that looked at all suspicious. Still that peculiar odor continued to strike his sense of smell, stronger than before, if anything.

"Must be something burning, fellows!" announced Tubby, as he held a hand up so that he could close his nose with thumb and finger against the offensive odor.

The guide had meanwhile thrown himself down at the brink of the stream and proceeded to drink his fill. Evidently he had no fear concerning the quality of the water. Typhoid germs were unknown to his lexicon; and so long as water looked fairly clear it suited him.

He was getting on his feet again as Tubby

made that last remark. His horse had been pulling more violently than ever at the rein, and the Belgian started to say something uncomplimentary to the animal in Flemish.

Rob had stopped examining the shore upon which they were standing. He turned his gaze across the stream to the opposite bank, for his scout training told him that since the breeze came from that quarter he would be apt to learn the cause of the odor, so like burnt powder, if he followed it up.

The others heard Rob give a half suppressed shout, as though he had made a sudden and startling discovery.

"Oh! what is it?" cried Tubby, straining to keep his horse from trying to start up the ascent again.

"Across the river, over there under the arch of the bridge, don't you see that little curl of blue-white rising?" exclaimed Rob. "Watch it and you'll find that it is creeping along over the ground. Come, we've got to get up out of this in a hurry! Turn your horses, and let them help

to drag you up! Quick, everybody; not a second to lose, I tell you!"

Tubby no longer tried to hold his horse back; on the contrary, he even urged the animal to climb the grade in frantic haste. He did not know what it all meant, but Rob acted as though there must be some terrible danger threatening them; and Tubby was no fool.

With cries and shouts they urged the animals to ascend. Several times a horse would slip, and come near falling headlong backward; then it was the one who held the reins found it necessary to encourage the struggling beast with word and act, so that the horse might regain his footing.

Tubby, chancing to glimpse Rob's face about the time they drew near the top was horrified to see how very white it seemed. Then more than ever did he realize that it must be something dreadful that had threatened them.

"Rob, tell us what it was all about?" Tubby managed to gasp, when, having reached the road again, they were hurrying back as rapidly as

they could go, the horses helping to drag them along.

"Just this," Rob told him briefly. "They've fixed a mine there under the bridge, so as to blow it up; and we've had the narrowest escape of our lives!"

CHAPTER VI.

GETTING NEAR THE WAR ZONE.

"Hold on to your horses, everybody!" called out Merritt, as he looked back toward the bridge from which they had now managed to press quite a little distance.

Merritt somehow did not seem to be very much astonished at what Rob had said. It might be he himself had entertained suspicions along those same lines.

They had heard that the determined Belgians were engaged in throwing all the obstacles possible in the way of an advance in force on the part of the invaders. If only cavalry were to be dealt with, the defenders of the soil had faith in their ability to take care of all that could be sent against them; but it was known to be a fact that the artillery arm was what the Germans meant to depend on more than anything else in this war for conquest.

If bridges and culverts were destroyed in every direction before the enemy could take possession of the roads, it would be next to impossible to move the great siege guns until some sort of strong temporary structure had been built in place of the stone and steel fabrics that were blown up.

And so, for days, there had been reports drifting in to Antwerp that certain bridges had been marked for destruction. Those who sallied forth in armored cars to speed over the country, and play havoc with their Maxim guns, found it necessary to revise their map of the district every night so as to conform to the new changes that had been wrought.

It was hardly ten seconds after Merritt told them to keep a firm grip on the bridles of their horses that the boys on looking back saw the bridge suddenly rear itself in the air. Then came a terrifying boom that made the very ground under their feet quiver; and, in a moment later, in place of the fine bridge lay a horrible gap, from which smoke and dust was arising in sickening clouds.

Tubby was as white as a sheet. The others could hear the big sigh with which he drew in a gulp of air.

"I want to say right here," he started to remark solemnly, "that I'm thankful I've got such a cracking good nose for queer odors. Think what might have happened to us if I hadn't begun to sniff around, and made Rob take notice. All that pile of stuff would have buried us out of sight. And the horses knew, sure they did. That explains why they acted so funny all the while. But isn't it a shame to see how they had to smash that splendid bridge!"

"Don't forget that this is war, Tubby," Merritt told him, "and to hinder the enemy from coming up, anything is allowable."

"But that's going to block our going on, I take it," ventured Tubby, watching Anthony, who showed evidences of having been considerably excited by the explosion, though Tubby could not tell whether it was fear that influenced the man, or an overmastering desire to join the army, and engage in some of this obstructive work himself.

"Oh! that doesn't follow," Rob assured him. "I noticed that the river was shallow just now; and I imagined I could see the old ford that used to answer before this bridge was ever thought of. We can get across without swimming. You forded the Rio Grande once upon a time, Tubby, and such a little bug stream as this shouldn't phase you a bit."

"Oh! count on me going wherever the rest of you lead," retorted Tubby, with a blustering air, as though he did not want anyone to think him at all timid.

"We might as well go back now," remarked Rob, "and see about getting over. If the mine has been exploded, there shouldn't be any danger; I want to try that ford."

It was found that though the bridge was wrecked pretty badly, the greatest damage was to the span, and not so much to the anchorages or piers. In time another arch could be built—should peace ever come to this distracted land—when men would be able to once more "beat their swords into ploughshares," and start to rebuilding what had been destroyed.

"Follow after me," Rob told them, as he started to urge his horse across where he could see the old ford had been.

Little of the material from the wrecked bridge had been thrown to any distance, so the ford was not blocked. The horses still displayed more or less restlessness, as though they could not understand that, with such a smell of choking gases in the air, the danger was all over. The three boys, however, had had considerable experience in handling balky animals, and knew just how to urge them on.

Once on the other side, they started up the bank. As they arrived at the road, having crossed the abyss, they saw a crowd of men hurrying toward the spot. They were partly Belgian soldiers, it turned out, along with some civilians, possibly men versed in explosives or strategy to be employed to delay the advance of the German artillery.

Of course, they were very much excited at meeting the boys. The khaki uniforms seemed to soften their anger to some extent, but one who

appeared to be in authority started to scold them for walking so blindly into a trap.

Through the guide Rob hastened to explain how it came they had not suspected the truth. Then as questions began to follow, he also told who and what they were, even mentioning something concerning their self-imposed mission into the danger zone of the fighting.

When the precious passport, written out by the good burgomaster, was shown, it had an additional soothing effect. The man in charge of the squad of destruction smiled and nodded as he perused the document, written in French.

"He say burgomaster his uncle!" explained Antonio, after the other had handed the paper back, and made some remark.

"Well, now, that's what I call fine. Tell him we're glad we got out from under that bridge in time," said Rob, "and also that we think he made a clean sweep of the job."

This seemed to please the Belgian officer, for he insisted on shaking hands all around. Feeling that they were now free to proceed, the scouts resumed their journey along the road that led

to Brussels; probably, wholly in the hands of the invaders further on toward the capital, since rumor had it that immense numbers of German troops were daily being moved toward Ghent.

"All of which only goes to show how necessary it is to be constantly on the watch while you're in a country that's fighting for its life," Merritt remarked to his companions as they lost sight of the ruined bridge.

"If only we had eyes in the back of our heads, we might get along a heap better, I think," grumbled Tubby, as his horse awkwardly stumbled over some small object, and gave him a shock.

"It was a close call, all right," acknowledged Merritt, "and has sobered our guide a whole lot, I notice. He listens to every far-off boom now, as though something might be drawing him. But the morning is wearing away, so I suggest that we stop at the very first village we come to, and see if we can beg, buy, or steal something to eat. I'm hungry as a bear."

"Oh! bless you, Merritt, for those kind words!" called out Tubby. "I've felt a vacuum down

around my belt line for two hours back. Whoa! there!" he added, as his horse stumbled again. "Want to break my neck, you animated skeleton? He knocks his hoofs together every third step he takes. No wonder they didn't grab him for the cavalry; he'd have fallen all over himself in the first charge."

Coming to a little hamlet, the boys found a house where they could secure something in the way of a lunch. Even at this early stage in the war, however, prudent hotel keepers realized that times were going to be hard, and that it would be the part of wisdom to conceal all the stores possible against a rainy day, or the raids of such invaders who might be billeted upon the villagers.

Here the boys remained between one and two hours, since the day was unusually hot, and their mounts were not in the best of condition for standing hard service.

Some of the good people had left for safer quarters, which would mean Antwerp, of course, —deemed impossible of capture at that day on account of its wonderful defenses. A group

gathered in front of the little hotel, and questioned Anthony as to who the three boys in the uniform of scouts might be, and of the nature of their mission that tempted them to invade a region being made desolate by war.

Anthony himself knew very little on that score; but since it would not look well for him to admit this fact, it is possible he "drew the long bow" to some extent. He may even have told all sorts of fairy stories about the boys being English agents sent over to learn facts in connection with the movements of the German army, so that a strong force of the allies from across the Channel could be hastily dispatched to the scene, and chase the haughty Germans back across the Rhine.

Some idea like this the boys found very prevalent all through their journey. The Belgians seemed to believe the English were getting a wonderful surprise ready with which to stagger the enemy. If they could have only known how an army had to be built up step by step in the great island country, they might have felt less confi-

dence, and perhaps shown more discretion in attacking the invaders.

Rob suspected something of this sort when he saw the way the villagers observed him and two chums, staring at them as though they were curiosities.

"Makes you feel like some punkins, to have all these people watch every little thing you do, and get out of your way so quick when you go to make a move, don't it?" remarked Tubby, evidently tickled over the attention shown them.

"I don't just like it, to tell you the truth," admitted Merritt.

"Oh! you're too modest by half, Merritt!" jeered the fat scout.

"It isn't that, Tubby," explained the other. "Rob here says he believes our guide is spreading the report that we're English messengers, sent ahead to pick up news about the Germans, so they can be smashed when the British army gets here."

"Well, what of that?" demanded his friend. "It isn't so *very* dreadful that I can see, to be mistaken for a Johnny Bull."

"You'll change your tune, my boy," Rob told

him, "if the Germans should come along and nab us. We'll soon see how you begin to roar out that you're a Yankee, as true-blue as they make them."

"Oh! but they wouldn't know anything about that!" declared Tubby, though showing signs of increasing dismay at the same time.

"You never can tell," he was told by Rob. "The ways of these smart Germans are past finding out. They've got spies everywhere. Right now there may be some secret sympathizer with the Fatherland in that bunch close by, taking in all that silly Anthony has been saying."

"Gingersnaps and popguns!" gasped Tubby, "if that's really so I guess we'd better muzzle our guide in a hurry. Where's he gone to, do you think, Rob? It was all of half an hour ago that I saw him last, talking to the crowd."

"I was wondering about that myself," said Merritt. "If we expect to be getting along about this time, we ought to look Anthony up."

"You take a turn that way, and I'll step into the taproom of the inn, to see if he is there," remarked Rob, who had a slight frown on his face

as he spoke, as if he might not be wholly satisfied with the way in which their guide was acting.

Five minutes later Rob and Merritt joined Tubby at the same time.

"Nothing doing in my section," remarked Merritt, "except that I'm afraid somebody has swiped one of our nags, for I could only count three horses hitched there."

"Then, that settles it!" said Rob positively.

"Settles what?" piped up Tubby.

"Anthony has basely deserted us, and taken to the back road!" Rob told them. "I feared as much from what the little inn proprietor let out; but what you say clinches the thing. Our guide is a mile or more on the way back to Antwerp by now!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE DESERTION OF ANTHONY.

"The miserable hound! Hanging would be too good for him!" exclaimed Merritt, who it appeared had not up to that instant suspected anything like the truth, and was therefore taken completely by surprise.

"That all depends on what his motive may have been," said Rob reflectively.

"Why, it's plain he got cold feet after that little experience at the bridge this morning!" Merritt hastened to declare. "I thought he was a man of more nerve than that. I hope all Belgians are not made of the same kind of stuff."

"Hold on a minute, Merritt," Rob cautioned him, "you are jumping to conclusions now without being sure of your ground. I've been watching Anthony from time to time and I've noticed that whenever he happened to speak of the gallant doings of his people on the battlefields his

face would beam with pride, and what I took to be a touch of envy."

"Oh!" said Tubby, grasping the idea, "then, Rob, you think our guide shook us just because he couldn't hold back any longer. He thought he ought to be on the firing line along with the rest, and get in a crack at the invaders of his country. Is that the stuff, Rob?"

"I'm thinking that way," Rob informed him gravely, "but we've got no time to look Anthony up. Whether he's gone to join the Belgian army or turned back to the city of Antwerp isn't going to cut any figure in our calculations."

"That's about the size of it, Rob," agreed Merritt, beginning to show signs of returning confidence, when the patrol leader spoke with such vim.

"What we've got to do is to figure out whether we want to call the whole thing off just because we haven't a guide to do the talking business for us and turn back to the city, or set our teeth together and push on."

Tubby and Merritt exchanged looks.

The latter even half opened his mouth as if

to indignantly protest against giving up the most cherished plan of his life for a little snag, such as the desertion of Anthony proved. Then he suddenly closed his lips firmly. He had remembered an important fact, which was that after all he should not be the one to make such a suggestion. Let one of these good chums, who were his side partners, express an opinion first of all. That was why Merritt remained silent.

"Oh! we just can't quit at the first puff!" remonstrated Tubby. "Fellows who have been through all we have shouldn't be built that way. Think of the battles we've been up against on the diamond and the gridiron; and did anybody ever hear us complain, or show a yellow streak? Well, I guess not! Tell him how you feel about it, Rob!"

"Just as you do, Tubby," responded the scout leader heartily. "I wasn't counting any too much on Anthony's services, come to speak of it. Nine-tenths of what we expected to accomplish would have to come from our own hard work. If you put it up to me to decide, I say every time, go ahead!"

Merritt looked almost joyous. Though he was not a demonstrative fellow as a rule, he could not help reaching out and squeezing a hand of each of his faithful chums. Indeed, no one ever knew more reliable allies than Merritt possessed in Rob and Tubby, who were ready to go through fire and water with him, if necessary.

"It may all turn out for the best," Tubby continued, with fine optimism, such as these chubby fellows nearly always show since life looks rosy to them. "And it's going to save you a little money in the bargain, too, Merritt. I must brush up my French and Flemish from now on. Already I can say as many as six words of the first, and I think I know how to almost pronounce one in Flemish."

"No trouble to tell what that one is," remarked Rob, laughing.

"It stands for grub!" added Merritt.

"Now, I consider it strange how you should guess so easily," Tubby shot back at them reproachfully. "I suppose I'll have to acknowledge the corn. We've got to eat to live, and so I thought I ought to know the right word that

would produce results quickest. Don't blame me, boys; I was thinking of you as well as myself."

"Well, shall we get out of here?" asked Rob. "I don't altogether like the way we are being stared at by some of the people of the village. They say in Antwerp that there's a hidden sympathizer of the Germans in every city, town and hamlet through the whole of Belgium always trying to send information of value to the enemy."

"Huh! don't know just what to believe, and what to brand as big yarns," protested Tubby. "Since we've landed here I've heard stories that would make poor old Baron Munchausen hide his head in shame as a has-been. If one-tenth of the same turned out to be true, these Germans are the most remarkable people that ever lived for getting ready for a war against the whole world forty years ahead of the date. I'm beginning to use my own horse-sense, and figure things out."

Ten minutes later they turned their backs on the little hamlet where a fair meal had been pro-

cured, and which had also witnessed their first real misfortune in the base desertion of Anthony.

In many cases they found the roads occupied with throngs of fugitives. These poor peasants were flocking, in a general way, toward Antwerp, though possibly a few of them meant to cross the line into the Netherlands, where they hoped to be safe from the German armies of invasion that were gradually progressing further and further toward the coast.

A thousand-and-one sights greeted the eyes of the three scouts. More than a few times they stopped for some purpose or other that did their hearts credit. Once it was a limping boy whose condition excited the pity of Rob. He did not hesitate to put to some use the practical knowledge of surgery that he had picked up in company with all the other members of the Eagle Patrol.

Another time they saw a wretched woman trying to mend the wheel of a miserable old handcart, upon which she had some humble belongings, and three small children. That was more than the boys could stand. They stopped their

horses, and giving the lines of their mounts into the keeping of Tubby, Rob and Merritt busied themselves with fixing up the disabled wheel.

Although they had next to no tools with which to work, their skill proved sufficient to surmount the difficulty. Inside of twenty minutes the woman was able to trudge along again. She thanked them volubly in Flemish, which they did not understand. Tubby listened eagerly, but owned up that it was beyond the range of his extremely limited vocabulary, consisting, as that did, of but one word.

"Well, that look on her face paid us for all our trouble," Rob remarked contentedly, as he once more remounted, and led the way along the highway.

"It's something fierce where all these forlorn people come from," said Tubby.

"To me the greatest puzzle is where they're all going," Merritt added.

"If you should ask them," Rob advanced as his opinion, "nine out of ten couldn't begin to tell you. Some have had their houses burned over their heads; others I expect have seen their homes

destroyed by bursting shells, where they happened to lie near the place where an artillery duel was going on. So they've just started on the road, hoping to reach *somewhere* the fighting won't follow."

"It's a terrible sight," sighed Tubby. "I'll never forget it as long as I live. Every minute I'm telling myself we ought to be the happiest people going over in America, to know that we needn't get mixed up in all this butcher business."

Slowly the afternoon wore away. The three chums did not make very rapid progress, and for many reasons. In the first place their horses objected to putting forth any unusual exertion, and seemed to consider that they were doing their full duty by merely working their four weary legs in a machine-like fashion.

Then, again, the roads were cluttered in places with squads of the peasant population fleeing from the battle lines. Three times did the scouts come upon detachments of Belgian soldiers stationed behind temporary intrenchments, where they expected to harass the advance forces of the Germans whenever they appeared.

From these men they received many curious stares. Of course the soldiers could not understand why three boys in khaki, who were undoubtedly not Belgian scouts, should be heading so boldly toward the scene of carnage, when everybody else was fleeing madly the other way.

They were halted and questioned. At first Rob felt a qualm of anxiety, lest the fact that they no longer had an interpreter in their company to explain things might get them into trouble. That fear soon vanished, however. In every instance it was found that some man could either talk fair English, or else what little French the patrol leader was able to muster explained matters in a satisfactory manner.

The probability was that the message given them by the burgomaster of Antwerp was much more potent than anything else. The worthy official was a well known and highly respected man; and among these commands there were always those who knew him personally, so that his "passport," while hardly worth the paper upon which it was written, officially, acted magically with the Belgian officers.

As the afternoon sun began to draw near the western horizon they continued to be on the look-out for some haven of refuge. Another night was coming; they must not only have food but lodging, if this latter could possibly be obtained.

"Of course," explained Rob, as they walked their sorry looking horses on, "while we'd like to find some sort of respectable beds to-night, if the worst comes, we can always make shift with a haystack. It wouldn't be the first time we've curled up in the hay and snatched a few winks of sleep."

"I should say not," Tubby assured him. "Only I do hope we manage to strike a dinner-call somehow or other. I can do without a bed, but I must have eats or I'll collapse utterly, like a balloon with the gas let out."

"Please don't think of it, Tubby," Merritt implored him. "We promise to do everything in our power to find the grub. Brace up! We're coming to a village; and I think I can see an inn the first thing."

It proved to be as Merritt had said, and better still, the man who kept the modest little tavern

assured Rob in fair English that he would be proud to serve the honored guests; also that he had once spent a year in the Birmingham machine shops himself.

"Just like all the rest, he takes us for Johnny Bulls," complained Tubby.

"Well, that's partly your fault," Rob told him.

"Just because I'm so well filled out, I suppose you mean, Rob? Well, if they keep on thinking that, I guess I'll have to get busy and cultivate a real cockney accent. 'Beg pawdon; thank *you;* my word!' You see I've got a few of their favorite jabs spotted."

As before, they found themselves the object of more attention than any of them enjoyed. People kept peeping in through the open door of the room where the three strange young chaps in khaki were enjoying their really excellent supper.

"Don't mind them," advised Rob, when he saw that Tubby was posing, as if conscious of being in the lime-light. "Let's finish our supper, and then we can sit outside on the porch as the sun

goes down, and talk over our plans for to-morrow."

"Yes," added Merritt quickly, "because to-morrow may take us so far on our journey that we'll either find our man, or meet with some bitter disappointment, something I hate to think about."

"Don't do it, then," advised Rob. "We must believe everything is bound to come out right, and that you'll not only run across Steven Meredith, but that the paper will be found under the lining of the cover to his field-glass case, where he's been carrying it all this while, without knowing it."

"One thing sure," said Merritt grimly, "if he's left that post and gone anywhere else, I'll follow him, hit or miss, if it takes me to the battle front."

"Listen!" exclaimed Tubby. "What's that man shouting, Rob?"

"As near as I can make out," replied Rob quickly, "he says the Uhlans are entering at one end of the town."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN THE UHLANS CAME.

When Rob Blake made this startling explanation of the loud cries from without, his two companions started up from the table in dismay. They could easily understand that the coming of the German cavalrymen just then threatened them with unpleasant consequences.

If they were mistaken for English boys they might expect not only rough treatment, but possibly find themselves railroaded into Germany, with one of those terrible dungeons in a Rhine fortress as their destination.

Perhaps even Tubby began to deplore the fact that he chanced to be wearing a Boy Scout khaki suit, and a campaign hat besides; with the leggings that scouts in the States have adopted instead of the woolen stockings used by other branches of the organization abroad.

If pride must have a fall, Tubby began to

experience the first twinges of regret at that moment as he scrambled to his feet, and waited to hear what Rob or Merritt would say.

"It may be only a false alarm," Merritt suggested. "These poor people have been seeing imaginary regiments of Uhlans ever since war was declared."

"But they're making oodles of noise, anyhow!" Tubby protested.

"We can soon find out if it's so," said Rob, hurrying over to one of the windows, which were partly screened with flimsy curtains, through which any person from the inside could look out, but which would prevent scrutiny from the village street, except when the lamps were lighted later.

They quickly saw that their worst fears were realized. Down the street at least fifty horsemen were riding. The fact that they carried lances and wore the customary spiked helmets of the German troopers told Rob as well as words could have done that at last they were gazing on the far-famed Uhlans.

They were not at all the fierce-appearing war-

riors the boys may have pictured them, having the Russian Cossacks in mind at the time. Indeed, a number seemed to be laughing heartily, doubtless on account of the evident terror their presence had apparently inspired in the breasts of the villagers. And some of them were rosy-cheeked young fellows, who, shorn of their military accouterments, would have struck the scouts as good-natured German youths.

Others, however, were more grim and haughty, as though they thought it their duty to impress these stubborn Belgians with a due sense of their importance as factors to be dealt with.

It was a thrilling sight to see those hard-riding soldiers of the Kaiser coming along the village street, with people staring at them from open doors and windows, yet none daring to utter a word of protest. Fear was written largely on nearly every face, though doubtless there were also those who viewed the coming of the hated Uhlans with illy suppressed rage. Perhaps they had lost some dear one during the battles that had already been fought around Liège and other places; or in the destruction of Louvain.

"Rob, don't you see they're heading right this way?" whispered Tubby suddenly, after they had watched the stirring picture for a minute or so.

"Yes, that's a fact," replied Rob. "Let's hope they mean to only ride through the village, and leave by the other side."

"Gee! I hope now they won't fall in love with our horses, and run them off!" ventured Tubby, excited by his fears in that respect; for Tubby did not like to walk any more than he could possibly help.

"Not much danger in that line," scoffed Merritt. "But look at that officer in front of the column—he's pointing right this way, you notice, Rob, and is saying something to another rider close behind him."

"Oh! can he have seen us?" wailed Tubby, no doubt having very positive visions of prison life before him just then, with solitary confinement on a diet of bread and water, which was the worst punishment he could imagine.

"That's impossible," Rob instantly assured him. "The chances are he's discovered this inn, and is telling the other officer they may be able

to secure something to eat, and a bottle of wine here. Their men can pick up supper through the place, making the poor people furnish the meal, or have their houses knocked about their ears."

"But if they come in here do we want to stay and be arrested for English spies?" asked Merritt; whereat Tubby's lips could be seen to move, although no words came forth, while he anxiously waited for Rob to decide.

The other had already made up his mind.

"That would be foolish on our part," he told Merritt, "and unnecessary in the bargain. They may only stop for five minutes to drink wine, and then go on again, because they know they're in the enemy's country here. We must find a place to hide till they leave. Come along with me, fellows."

Now it happened that Rob had never forgotten one of the things all scouts are enjoined to impress upon their minds; which is to observe the most minute detail wherever they happen to be. In the woods this faculty for observation had often served the patrol leader a good turn, and the same thing happened now.

While sitting there and enjoying the warm supper which the keeper of the village inn had spread before them, Rob had taken note of his surroundings. Thus he knew just where the stairs leading to the upper *etage* or floor of the inn was located; and also that it could not be easily seen from the door leading to the street.

He led Tubby and Merritt over to the stairs.

"We'll slip up here," he told them, for a quick glance around had assured Rob that no one was watching them.

Most of those who had been around the tavern hurried outside at the first sign of alarm, and were now gaping at the coming troop. The proprietor, guessing that his establishment would be the first object of attention on the part of the invading enemy, was wildly striving to conceal certain valuables he possessed under a board in the floor, where, perhaps, he also kept his choicest wines.

Once the scouts had climbed aloft they managed to gain a sort of garret where broken furniture and hair-covered trunks seemed to be stored.

"This will answer us as well as any other place," Rob told them, as he closed the door, and managed to push a heavy trunk against it.

"And there are two little peephole windows, too, for all the world like eye-glasses, but big enough for us to see through," Tubby remarked, groping his way among the collection of riffraff with which the garret was encumbered, until he found himself able to kneel and look through the dusty glass of a window.

"They're spreading all over the place," he immediately announced, "and making the village people get supper ready for them. Chances are, too, they won't whack up a red cent for all they eat and drink. Whee! so this is war, is it? Well, all I can say is it's a mighty mean game."

"Some of them have come into the inn," ventured Merritt. "I can hear heavy voices below us, German voices, too. You know sound travels up walls like everything. And there's a heap of bustle going on below, as if the landlord, his wife and everybody else might be on the jump to wait on the Uhlan guests."

"Can you blame them?" said Tubby, "when

like as not if they said no they'd find a torch put to their house? Rob, you don't think they'll come up here, do you?"

"Oh! hardly, unless they take to ransacking the house for valuables, or more wine. They must know time is too valuable for that, because there are Belgian forces all around this place who might drop in on them. No, they'll get a hurried bite and then be off again."

For some little time they continued to listen to the confused sounds that came to their ears. Considerable shouting from the street testified to the fact that some of the soldiers might be acting, as Tubby expressed it, "rough-house"; and although the light outside was commencing to grow rather dim, looking through the window they saw several instances where a soldier struck some half grown boy who may have acted in a sullen fashion, or declined to do what he was told.

All at once there was a shot!

This was followed by a great outcry, in which loud German voices could be heard giving orders. A scrambling downstairs announced that

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the officers who had been eating at the inn were hurriedly rejoining their command.

"Are the Belgian troops coming, Rob?" asked Tubby, finding it impossible to see what was going on, because he had been unable to open his window, as the others had done.

"No, it must have been some desperate villager sniping from a house," replied Rob; and a minute later he continued hastily: "Yes, they're carrying a Uhlan to his horse, and threatening the people with guns and lances."

"Oh! I hope now they don't start in to shooting the poor things down!" cried the sympathetic Tubby, wringing his hands, though hardly conscious of what he was doing.

"They've rushed into the house next to this," Merritt now exclaimed, "and seem to be searching it, which tells me the party who fired, man or boy, must have been concealed there!"

"Gee! that's getting pretty near home!" muttered Tubby.

"Rob, did you see that puff of smoke coming out of the house then?" Merritt presently demanded, almost bursting with the excitement.

"Yes, I'm sorry to say I do see it," replied the leader of the Eagle Patrol, as he continued to look downward. "They've set fire to the building; and what bothers me most of all is the wind coming straight this way. I'm afraid it means the inn will take fire too, and like as not be burned to the ground!"

CHAPTER IX.

WITH FIRE AND SMOKE.

"Gingersnaps and popguns! then we're in for a warm time of it!" Tubby burst out.

"Let's hope they manage to get the fire out; or that it doesn't spread to the inn," Merritt soothed him, after the manner of one who wished to throw oil on troubled waters.

"If only the Germans would pull out right away we could get down from here in good time," continued Tubby hopefully. "Look again, fellows, and see if they show any signs of skipping."

"They seem to be galloping all over the village, as far as I can see, and threatening to shoot if anybody dares take a crack at them," Rob announced, after making a hurried survey.

"Oh! my stars!" groaned Tubby, "little did I ever dream that I'd stand a chance of being cooked before I'd been in Belgium two days. I

always said I liked cold weather best, and now I know it. Baked or stewed or even broiled doesn't suit my taste."

"The fire next door is beginning to rage fiercely," remarked Rob. "The people are just standing on, and sullenly watching it burn. They don't seem to dare to offer to help save a single thing, because they might be shot down."

"That house is doomed!" asserted Merritt, gloomily.

"Better keep back more," cautioned Rob. "The light grows stronger all the while, you notice, and we might be seen up here by some Uhlan, who'd think it fine sport to send a shot if only to frighten us. I thought I saw one man glance up. If he happened to see that we wore khaki and had on these military looking hats he'd pass the word along that there were Belgian soldiers hiding in the inn."

"Please don't start a riot," begged Tubby. "It's sure bad enough as it stands without that happening. If we had wings now we might sail away. What wouldn't I give for an aëroplane

to come along at this minute, and pick me up? Rob, has our house taken fire yet?"

At first Rob did not see fit to answer, upon which the suspicious Tubby pressed him to declare the truth.

"No matter how bad it is," he said soberly, "we should know the worst, instead of pulling the wool over our own eyes, and believing everything's lovely. How about it, Rob?"

"I'm afraid it's a bad job, Tubby."

"You mean we're on fire, do you?' questioned the other, with a hurried intake of his breath, as his heart possibly beat tumultuously with new apprehension.

"Yes, it's caught the end of the inn, and with that breeze blowing there isn't a chance for this house to be saved," Rob continued. "I'm sorry for the poor man who owns it; but then he'll be no worse off than tens of thousands of other Belgian sufferers."

"But think of us, will you?" the fat scout urged. "We're neutrals only, and it's a shame to make us stand for that foolish shot some sniping boy may have fired. Hadn't we better make

our way downstairs, Rob, and throw ourselves on the mercy of the Uhlans?"

"I'm in favor of sticking it out just as long as we can," said Merritt desperately; for only too well did he know that once they fell into the hands of the Germans, all chances of carrying out his well laid plans would be lost.

"Oh! so am I, when it comes to that," affirmed Tubby; "and I hope that neither of you think I'd be the one to scream before I'm hurt. But I do smell smoke, and that looks bad, as the plight of Bluebeard's wife."

There could be no questioning that what Tubby said was so, for little spirals of penetrating smoke had commenced to come under the door, so that they could already feel their eyes begin to smart.

Rob went back to the open window to watch. He knew that the thing calculated to help them most of all would be the flitting of the Uhlan troop. If the raiders would only gallop away from town there would be an opportunity for the three Boy Scouts to make their way from the garret of the doomed inn.

"Are they showing any signs of going yet?"

asked Tubby, rubbing one hand continually over the other; and then he burst out into a half hysterical fit of laughter as he went on to add: "D'ye know, when I said that it made me think of Bluebeard, don't you remember where the wife was waiting to be called down to lose her head, and expected her brothers to come to the rescue, she had her sister watching out of the window for a cloud of dust on the road? And all the while she keeps on asking: 'Sister Ann, Sister Ann, do you see anyone coming?'"

"I guess you're not as badly rattled as you make out, Tubby," suggested Merritt, "when you can joke like that with the house on fire. In this case you're wanting to know whether there's anybody going. Well, they're here yet, I'm sorry to tell you."

"But I think they are getting together to ride away," Rob added.

"Did they shoot down many of the poor villagers on account of that sniper?" asked the fat scout anxiously.

"No, I couldn't see anything like that," Rob hastened to assure him. "There was some firing,

but it looked to me as if it might be done for effect, just like cowpunchers ride into town, yelling, and shooting their guns in the air. But at the same time I think they must have got the person who did the sniping."

"Yes, I heard several shots that seemed to come from inside that next house," Merritt admitted. "It'll certainly be his funeral pyre. The house is all aflame, and burning fiercely."

"Poor chap! he must have been crazy to fire on Uhlans when they were in such force," Tubby declared. "They never refuse a dare, I've heard said. And believe me, I don't ever want to test them. I hope they hear the call soon now. That fire must be getting pretty close to us by this time, boys!"

Rob opened the door of the garret a trifle, after having pushed back the heavy trunk. Immediately a cloud of smoke entered, at which poor Tubby fell back in dismay.

"Oh! we're goners, I'm afraid!" he moaned, making his way through the pall in the direction of the one small window that was open, so that he might secure a breath of fresh air.

"If we can keep the smoke out a little while longer it's going to be all right," Rob informed them. "The Uhlans are all in the saddle, and seem to be only waiting for the order to leave. I can hear the captain in charge of the troop telling the villagers something or other, and he is speaking in French, too; so I reckon it must be a warning that if a single shot is fired as they ride away, they will turn back and not leave one stone unturned in the place."

"That seems to be the usual Uhlan way, I've heard," muttered Tubby, glad he could say anything; for at the time he was desperately clutching his nose with thumb and fingers, as though in hopes of keeping the pungent smoke from entering his lungs.

He had apparently gotten beyond the seeing stage, for both his eyes were kept tightly closed. At the same time Tubby was listening eagerly for good tidings. He knew that his chums were constantly on the lookout.

"There they go off!" he heard Rob say presently, when the situation had almost become unbearable.

The sound of many hoofs coming to their ears, even above the roaring of the fire, affirmed this statement. Tubby acted as though he wanted to cheer, and then reconsidered his intention, through fear that the sound might be heard by the Uhlans, and work them harm.

"Now, let's get out of here," said Rob briskly. "Take hold of my coat, Tubby. Merritt, bring up the rear. We'll find a room just below this where we can drop out of a window easily, if the stairs are ablaze, as I'm afraid may be the case."

Passing down from the garret in this fashion, through dense billows of smoke that struck terror to the soul of Tubby, they presently found themselves in one of the ordinary rooms, used perhaps for stray guests.

Looking from the window Rob saw that it would be easy for him and Merritt to drop down on the turf below. Tubby must be taken care of first, and so Rob snatched a sheet off a bed, and twisted it into the shape of a rope.

This he forced Tubby to take hold of, and then climb over the window sill.

"Keep a fast grip, and we'll lower you!" Rob told the fat scout, who had full confidence in his comrades since they had never failed him.

After all, it was an easy thing to let him down, because the distance was short. As for themselves, the other two boys scorned to make use of such means. Clambering out of the window, when Tubby reported himself safe below, they hung down as far as they were able, and then just let go. There was a little jar as they struck solid ground, and it was all over.

"Beautifully done, fellows," Tubby was saying, as he dug his fat knuckles into his still smarting eyes. "We'd pass muster for fire laddies, I tell you. After all, it takes scouts to know what ought to be done. But I think some of these people must have gone out of their minds to whoop it up so. What's that poor woman shouting now, Rob? Can you make it out? And look how they're holding her back, would you? It must be the wife of the inn keeper; the loss of her home has unsettled her reason, I'm afraid, poor thing!"

But Rob, who had been listening, knew better, as he immediately proved.

"It's a whole lot worse than that, I'm afraid," he told the others. "She keeps calling out for her baby; and I think the child's been left in the burning building!"

CHAPTER X.

THE DUTY OF A SCOUT.

Tubby was dreadfully shocked when he heard the news.

"The poor thing!" he cried, "to be forgotten in all the row, and left to be smothered by the smoke, perhaps burned up in the bargain. Oh! Rob, I hope you're mistaken!"

"I wish I could believe so myself, Tubby, but if you look you can see them all staring up there at that window next to the one we jumped from. Some even point at it, and you notice more than a few of the women are crying like everything."

"But my stars! why doesn't somebody run up and get the child out, if that's so?" Tubby demanded,—forgetting that his eyes still smarted, —because this discovery, and the distress of the parents overwhelmed him.

"Because the lower floor is all afire, and the stairs can't be used," Merritt told him.

"If only we'd known about the child before we came out, we might have saved it," Tubby wailed. "If I could climb like some fellows I know, who can even go up a greased pole in the contests, I'd be for making my way up there right now. Hey! what are you going to do, Rob, Merritt? Let me help any way I can. Stand on my back if you want to; it's broad enough to do for a foundation! The poor little thing! We mustn't let it be burned if we can help it!"

Neither Rob nor Merritt had waited to give Tubby any answer when he made that really generous offer. They knew there would be no need of his back as a means for elevating one of them to the sill of the upper window. In fact, Rob had made a sudden discovery that must have been the main reason for his speedy actions.

"The tree is close to the house, Merritt!" he was saying as he sprang forward.

"Better still, Rob, one limb grows right alongside the window!" the other scout added, keeping in touch with the patrol leader.

They were quickly on the spot, Rob starting up the trunk of the tree at once.

"Don't follow me," he told his chum, as he climbed upward. "If I find the child I may want to drop it down to you. Get busy underneath, Merritt!"

"All right, Rob; I understand!" came the answer.

Tubby had also heard what was said. He came puffing forward, as though he did not mean to be left out entirely of the rescue.

"Let me help you, Merritt," he was saying, between his pants from his recent exertions.

"Sure I will, if there's any chance, Tubby."

"Can Rob reach that window from the limb?" the fat scout asked anxiously, as he tried to look straight upward, a task that was always a trying one with Tubby because of the odd shape of his chubby neck.

"He's about there now, you notice. There's something of a little ledge underneath and he's going to make it all right."

"There! He's clinging outside and starting to throw a leg over," Tubby exclaimed in evident rapture. "And if there is a child inside that room, our chum will find it. If it was me now,

I'd be so blind with the smoke I'd have to just grope my way around, and p'raps get lost in the shuffle."

"But what's that you've got in your hand, Tubby?" pursued Merritt, becoming aware for the first time that the other was holding on to some white object.

"This? Why, what but that fine sheet you used to lower me with," he was told.

"I remember that Rob dropped it down after you landed," said Merritt, "but I never thought you'd want to take it along with you, Tubby."

"Oh! shucks! don't you see, I picked it up when I started over after you," the stout boy tried to explain.

"But why should you do that?" persisted Merritt, who was looking eagerly aloft just then, and possibly not fully paying heed to what he was saying.

"Why, you know how firemen stand and hold a blanket for people to jump into?" explained Tubby; "I thought that if it came to the worst, Rob might drop the baby into this sheet, which both of us could hold stretched out!"

"Well, you *are* a daisy, after all, Tubby!" cried Merritt, in sincere admiration. "That's as clever a scheme as anyone could think up. Here, give us a grip of an end, and we'll get ready for business!"

Quickly they clutched the four corners of the sheet. Fortunately, it appeared to be a fairly new bed-covering, and might be trusted to bear a certain weight without tearing.

Having reached the point where nothing more could be done in order to assist Rob, the other two scouts had to stand there and wait, as the precious seconds crept by, each seeming like an age to their anxious hearts.

Meanwhile, what of Rob, who had, without the least hesitation, risked his life in order to save the child forgotten in the excitement of the Uhlans' coming, and the strange events that had so soon followed?

When he reached that window, he found it closed, but, on his pressing against the sash, it had swung inward, allowing him free access to the room.

It was rather an appalling prospect that con-

fronted Rob. The smoke seemed to be thick, and he could not see three feet away. For all he knew the fire that was raging in the lower part of the inn might by this time have eaten partly through the floor boards, so that, if he put his weight on them, he stood a chance of being precipitated into the midst of the flames.

Rob never hesitated a second. He had taken all these matters into consideration when making up his mind as to what he meant to attempt. More than this, he did not believe anything partaking of such a disaster threatened him in case he entered that apartment.

The most he feared was that he might be unable to discover where the child lay, for it was manifestly impossible to use one's eyes to any advantage, with all that veil of smoke interfering.

Over the window-sill he climbed, just as the two boys below witnessed. And, no sooner did Rob find himself in the room, than he started to cross it. He expected to find a bed somewhere, and toward this purpose he at once set himself.

He could hear the crackling of the flames below. Besides this, there came to him with pain-

ful distinctness the wails of the poor woman who was being restrained from trying to rush into the burning inn.

Rob was listening for something more. He had strong hopes that he might catch another sound, perhaps feeble, but enough to guide him to where the imperiled one lay in the bed or on the floor.

Groping as he advanced, and at the same time feeling with his feet, in case the object he sought should prove to be on the floor, Rob passed away from the vicinity of the open window. The smoke was pouring from the aperture now, as though it were in the nature of a funnel. This turned out to be of considerable help to the boy, for the draught served to thin the smoke that had filled the room to suffocation.

Now he had reached the farther wall, and, turning sharply to one side, started to comb this, every second expecting to come upon a bed of some sort.

It was about this time that Rob thought he heard a low, gasping cry just ahead of him. Though unable to use his eyes with any measure

of success in locating the source of the sound, he was encouraged, and persisted in pushing forward. In this way he found himself bending over a cot.

His groping hand came in contact with something warm—something that moved ever so slightly at his touch. It was the forgotten child. Rob found that it was a mere baby, possibly not much more than a year old.

The smoke had not yet choked the little thing, though a short time longer would have certainly finished it.

Rob had no sooner clutched it in his arms than he tried to set himself right for the window by means of which he had reached the room. In this he was assisted by the light that came through the opening, and which served as his guide. By the time he reached it, he could no longer see a single thing, and, when he leaned out of the window, his first thought was to shout:

"Merritt, are you down below? I can't see a thing! The smoke has blinded me!"

To his great satisfaction there came an immediate response, and never had words from the lips

of his chum sounded sweeter than they did then.

"Yes, we're both here, Rob. Let the child drop straight down! We'll take good care of it!"

"But you might miss it," objected Rob, still unable to see a thing.

"We can't! We've got a sheet spread out to catch it in!" Merritt sent back. "You're all right just there! Let go! Leave the rest to us!"

So Rob did as he was told. Accustomed to giving orders himself, he at the same time could obey when the necessity arose. Perhaps it was with considerable fear that he allowed the child to leave his grip; but the joyful shout arising from his chums below assured him that all was well.

Then he heard a feminine shriek, and judged that the frantic mother had darted to where the boys were standing, to clasp her rescued offspring to her breast.

Rob crawled over the ledge. He could not see how to make that friendly limb again, but then there was no need of going to all that trouble. He had dropped in safety before, and felt able to do the same again; so down he came like a plummet.

CHAPTER XI.

MYSTERIOUS SIGNALS IN THE NIGHT.

Of course once Rob found himself away from that pungent smoke his sight was gradually restored to him, though for quite a while his eyeballs smarted more or less from the experience.

"What will we do now?" asked Tubby, who was very happy in the knowledge that he had been allowed to have at least a hand, two of them, he affirmed, in the saving of the little one.

"I did have an idea of staying here all night," returned Rob. "But, since the inn has been destroyed, or will be utterly before the fire dies down, of course that's out of the question."

"You remember we asked questions of the tavern-keeper," Merritt remarked. "He told us there was another village about three miles farther on along the road. We might make out to go there, and see if they will put us up. If not,

it's a haystack for ours, provided there are any haystacks around."

"H'm! three miles or more, on that animated saw-buck, eh? I like that. It just invigorates me, of course," they heard Tubby telling himself, but his voice was anything but cheerful.

"Here comes the mother and the baby; she wants to thank you, Rob," Merritt told the patrol leader.

"Let's hurry and get out of this, then!" urged Rob, who, above all things, seemed to dislike being made a hero of when he felt that he had not done anything worth mentioning after all.

"No, you don't!" exclaimed Tubby, laying violent hands on his chum. "It's only fair that you give the poor woman a chance to tell you how grateful she is. As it stands to reason she speaks only Flemish, none of us can make head or tail out of what she says, unless she mentions that one word I know, which isn't likely."

But the woman could talk French, and she made it very evident to Rob that her mother heart was full of gratitude to him for what he had done. To the intense amusement of Tubby, she even

kissed Rob again and again, on either cheek, after the manner of the Belgians.

"Bully! That's the ticket! Give him another for his mother! I like to see anyone appreciate a *real* hero. And here's the innkeeper; mebbe he'll want to add a few little caresses, too, Rob. Now, don't grieve his heart by refusing. They all do it over here, I reckon."

The man who had owned the inn contented himself, however, by telling Rob just how much he appreciated the gallant work of the American Boy Scout. Rob would not soon forget that experience; and it must always bring a warm feeling to his heart when thinking of how, with such a little effort, he had made these two humble people supremely happy.

When he tried to make the man accept pay for their food, the other utterly refused to listen to such a thing.

"It is the good wife and myself, young m'sieu, who are heavily in your debt," he told Rob, with the simplicity of sincerity. "How, then, could we ever forgive ourselves for taking money from one who has saved our baby's life? It would

cause the blush of shame to dye our cheeks. We could never look our neighbors again in the face. It would not be right."

Of course that ended it, although Rob would rather have settled for that supper. Merritt tugged at his coat, understanding what it was all about.

"Don't insist, Rob," he told the other. "You mustn't try to take away the satisfaction he feels in having done one little thing for you. Let it go at that. He is not a poor man, I imagine, and has something laid by. Now, hadn't we better be getting out of here?"

"Oh! by the way, where are our horses?" asked Tubby, suddenly.

That reminded them they had forgotten all about the animals. The horses had been left tied to a rail at some little distance alongside the inn when they went in to get supper. Rob had intended, in case they meant to spend the night there, to have the three animals taken care of, and fed.

The hitching bar was entirely destitute of

horses of any type when they turned their eyes in that quarter.

"What if those awful Uhlans took our steeds away with them?" Tubby suggested, with his usual blank look, and that woebegone shake of his head.

"It seems unbelievable to me," Rob replied; "but I'll make some inquiries. The inn-keeper may have had them taken to the stables back yonder, though I remember noticing the animals at the time we were peeping out of the window when the troopers were coming down the village street. Wait for me, and I'll ask him."

"I surely hope you learn good news, Rob!" Tubby sighed, as he thought of three long Belgian miles separating him from some sort of bed, where he could secure the rest he needed so badly.

Presently Rob came back, and, when Tubby saw him shake his head in the negative, he gave a dull sort of a groan.

"Bottom knocked out of everything, is it, Rob?" he asked, in a dazed sort of way.

"Well, nobody could give me any hope," was

the reply. "Of course, the landlord was too excited over the burning of his house to notice just what the Uhlans did as they rode away, but one man told us he saw the troopers take our horses trailing behind them."

"Then that settles it," said Merritt; "though I'll never understand what they could want with those bony and tired nags, unless it was to make bologna sausages out of. We're in for a little hike that will stretch our legs."

"Yes, I guess it will," echoed Tubby, in a way that was hardly cheerful.

"And yours can stand a good deal of stretching, Tubby, you know," added Merritt.

"There's no use crying over spilt milk," said Rob, in his usual cheery fashion. "I more than half expected that we'd lose our mounts, sooner or later."

"So did I," agreed Merritt. "Only I thought perhaps they'd die on our hands from over-exertion. I never dreamed that rough riders like the German cavalrymen would want to be caught leading such ragtag animals along."

"Well, shall we make a move?" asked Rob.

There being no word against it, even from Tubby, who knew when duty called, the three scouts took their last look at the still burning houses, and then strode forth on the road leading toward the east.

The night promised to be unusually clear, for one thing. This pleased Rob, for, as they would have no moon to light them on their way, even the stars were welcome.

Three miles, under ordinary conditions, would have been reckoned almost nothing to scouts accustomed to taking lengthy hikes over hills and along valleys. It was a different matter, however, when passing through a war-distracted country, where hostile armies were encamped, so that at any minute they were apt to be greeted with a stern command, either in German or in French or Flemish, to stand and give the countersign, with the warning that to attempt flight would be at the peril of their lives.

Naturally the nerves of the boys were continually on edge. Tubby, in particular, kept his eyes roving from side to side, then into the uncertain distance ahead; and even at times turning

to ascertain whether they were being pursued by some soft-footed enemies who thought to take them by surprise.

In this way more than a mile was passed over. When Rob announced that he believed they must be all of halfway to the other village, Tubby expressed fervent thanks.

"I'm still able to put one foot in front of the other," he remarked in a hushed voice, for Rob had cautioned them against speaking aloud, as it might draw unwelcome attention to the little party.

"Wait up a minute, please," whispered Merritt, and there was that about his mysterious manner that gave Tubby another bad shock.

"What's the matter, now, Merritt?" he asked softly but solicitously. "Hope you haven't got a stone bruise on your heel. Did you hear anything suspicious? Are we going to be held up by a patrol? Oh! dear, why don't you hurry and tell us the worst?"

"What do you make of that flickering light over there, Rob?" asked Merritt. "It seems to be in an open field, as near as I can understand.

Just watch how it keeps on jumping up and down, then sideways."

"Why, it caught my eye just about the time you spoke, Merritt," came the reply from the patrol leader. "It must either be the work of some crazy person, or else a way of signaling by lantern."

"Say, I honestly believe you've struck the truth that shot, Rob," broke in Tubby, who had, of course, immediately turned toward the spot indicated. "See the way he swings the light around and makes all manner of figures in the air with the same. Why, that was the letter N, as sure as you live. And there goes E, followed by W and S. What does that spell but NEWS? Hey! we're on the track of a discovery!"

"Will you keep still, Tubby, and let's see if he begins again?" said Merritt eagerly.

"That must have been the last word of his message," remarked Rob quickly, "but chances are he'll repeat it. Stand ready to spell it out as well as we can. Three scouts accustomed to reading the Myers code of fire signaling ought

to—— There, that was C; and after that O, A, S, T—which means COAST."

Slowly, and somewhat laboriously, the boys spelled the message, letter for letter, their previous training proving of the greatest help; and this was the result:

"Coast clear—safe landing here—important news!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE MEETING BETWEEN THE LINES.

"Good for us! We're the ones to read a message! But say, was that in German, or French, or English, I want to know?" and Tubby seized his chums each by an arm, as he asked this question in a husky whisper.

"When you come to making dots and dashes in the Morse code, or what answers for the same with the heliograph, or a torch, or signal flags, I guess all languages are the same!" Merritt told him, more to keep Tubby quiet than for any other reason.

"The question is, who could that message have been for?" Rob was muttering.

"There, he starts in again," said Tubby. "He's a most persistent sort of chap, I take it, and means that the other fellow will get that message, sooner or later. What 'coast is clear'? Why, we're miles and miles away from the sea-shore

now, ain't we? And what under the sun does he mean by 'safe landing'? Where's the boat going to come from, somebody tell me quick?"

"I think I know," Rob had just managed to say in reply, when all of them were suddenly startled to hear a queer, rattling sound from behind that kept swiftly drawing nearer and nearer, until presently Tubby, in sheer alarm, dropped flat to the ground.

As he lay sprawled out on his back, judge of his astonishment when he saw some object, that was like an immense bird, pass over not fifty feet above him. It was heading directly for the spot where the light of the lantern glowed in that open field.

The shuttle sound abruptly ceased.

"He's shut off his engine," remarked Rob, apparently intensely interested.

"Yes, because he means to alight in the field," added Merritt.

Tubby suddenly comprehended what it must apparently mean. He hastened to scramble to his feet again, and no sooner had he accom-

plished this than he was, of course, busily engaged with his questions.

"Was that an aëroplane, Rob?"

"It certainly was," he was informed.

"Then that signal was for the pilot; that was what it meant by 'safe landing here' and 'coast clear!' Oh! I begin to see it all now. The 'important news' he mentioned in his message must be something a spy has gathered, and which he wants this air-pilot to carry back to the German lines for him? Am I on the right track, Rob?"

"Yes; that's about what it all means, Tubby."

"Then that machine must have been one of the Taube aëroplanes they told us about?"

"We expect it is," replied the obliging Rob.

"It must have landed by now, then, hasn't it?"

"As we can hear nothing moving, that's about the way things stand," replied the patrol leader.

"Please shut up, Tubby, so we can listen," Merritt suggested, not unkindly, but with the authority that his position as second in command of the Eagle Patrol allowed him to display.

Tubby thereupon collapsed; that is, he simply mumbled to himself, while staring as hard as he

could toward the spot where they could see that feeble little glow, made by the signaling lantern.

Rob was considerably interested in the adventure. It appealed to him in a way that was almost irresistible. He could understand that this might be only one of many methods taken by the astute Germans to get valuable information to the Staff Headquarters, which were at that time supposed to be located in the captured Belgian capital of Brussels.

Some spy, who had the run of the Belgian lines, would gather up certain information which he believed might be appreciated. Then, at a given time, when darkness covered the land, he was to be waiting for a daring aviator, who would take such risks as always accompany night traveling and landing with an aëroplane.

If the man aloft failed to receive the signal agreed on, he would hover around up to a certain hour, and then go back to Brussels. But, if the coast was clear, and the secret agent gave him assurance to that effect, he could dart down, and take charge of the precious documents or

maps showing the positions of various hostile forces, or else some new arrangement on the part of the defenses of Antwerp.

"I'd like to be able to just crawl up closer, and see what goes on," Merritt remarked, after they had stood there for a little while, listening and watching, yet seeing only that small light in the open space under the stars.

"Would it be safe?" asked Tubby cautiously; though, no doubt, if his chums decided on the venture, he would be found remaining at their side.

As often happened, here again Rob had to show his leadership, and curb his chum's impetuosity. Merritt was apt to do things sometimes on the impulse of the moment which were really unwise.

The prospect of stealing along, like Indians on the warpath, and gradually drawing closer to the spot where the pilot of the air-craft and the spy were in consultation, was very inviting. Rob, however, took a grip on himself, and decided that it would be most unwise of them to accept such an unnecessary risk.

"It's really none of our business, Merritt," he said. "First of all——"

"Of course not, but——"

"And, if they discovered us, you know what it would mean?" Rob continued gravely.

"I suppose they would fire on us," admitted Merritt.

"They certainly would, because they could only believe that we were enemies," continued the other, who, once he had started in to convince an impulsive comrade, believed in delivering sledge-hammer blows in succession, "and we're not aching to be filled with lead just yet."

"But," urged Merritt, "we might move along the road just a little bit farther; that would take us closer to the place. I'd like to be able to see that Taube machine fly over our heads again."

"Well, there's no objection to doing that, only we must keep mighty quiet. And, Tubby, mind your feet!" said Rob.

Tubby did not bother making any reply, for none seemed necessary. He knew well enough that, as a rule, he was inclined to be clumsy, and could stumble, if given even half a chance. But,

on the open road, and with the starlight to help out, he could not believe there was any danger.

So he sniffed disdainfully, and braced himself to move as softly as a cat; for it is wonderful how light on their feet most fat people can be, when they try their best.

Of course they could not see a thing, but then, imagination often helps out, and by this means they could picture the daring air-pilot, having successfully landed, in consultation with the secret agent.

When he had delivered what news he had picked up, perhaps verbally as well as through some written process, the spy would most likely assist the flier to get his Taube under way again, after which he could return to take up his risky profession amidst the Belgian forces.

Once Tubby did come near falling, as his toe caught in a projecting stone, which, of course, had been invisible. He managed to clutch hold of Merritt, who was on his left, and in this way avoided a tumble that might have caused more or less noise, even if it did not result in any damage to his nose.

Then Rob came to a stop. The others understood that he must have decided they were as near the place where the lantern glowed in the field as they could get without clambering over the stone barrier. This wall fence came up to Tubby's chin, so that he had to stand on his tiptoes to see over it.

"Has he sailed away yet, Rob?" asked Tubby, in his hushed voice, which sounded as though he might be using the soft pedal on his vocal organ.

"We would have heard the clatter of his motor if he had," returned Rob. "So far it hasn't been found possible to deaden the rattle of the propeller. And, on a still night like this, you could get that some ways off. No, they're talking business yet, I reckon."

"Gee whiz! but they must have a lot to say," muttered Tubby.

"After they separate we'd better lie low a while," suggested Rob.

"What for?" demanded Tubby, bound to understand everything, even if he had to swamp his mates with questions.

"The spy, or spies, for there may be more

than one of them, might just happen to cross this way, so as to get to the road; and, if they saw three shadowy figures moving along, the first thing they'd be apt to think was that we were enemies who had been listening."

"Oh! now I see!" Tubby admitted. "And, since we don't want to be made targets for them to practice at, we'll be wise to do what you say, Rob."

"Please, please, let up on all that talk, Tubby!" implored Merritt.

"Oh! I will, if it bothers you any," the fat boy answered; "but I think it queer a fellow can't ask a few little innocent questions once in a while, without being sat down on so hard. Now, I know a boy who made himself a real nuisance with his everlasting wanting-to-know, but I only speak up when there's absolute nec——"

Tubby stopped short there. It was not that the annoyed Merritt clasped a hand over his mouth, thus shutting off his supply of breath, for no such thought entered the mind of the corporal of the Eagle Patrol; but just then a horrible din, in which shots, mingled with wild shouts, broke out in the field nearby.

CHAPTER XIII.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

What had happened was no mystery to Rob and Merritt, though possibly Tubby, not quite so apt to jump to conclusions, remained a little bewildered at what was going on.

It seemed that the Belgians must have suspected something wrong, and possibly followed the bearer of the lantern when he went into the open field to flash his signals toward the sky.

The three scouts from across the ocean were not the only watchers who had read that message. Yes, and the coast had not been as clear as the signal man believed, since even then enemies must have been creeping toward him, though utterly unseen in the darkness.

The rapid discharge of guns, and the loud outcries of men engaged in desperate warfare, thrilled the boys. They could not see a single

figure, but the spiteful flashing of firearms, as they were discharged, told them that the fight was not all one-sided, and that the Germans must be resisting capture with their usual valor.

All at once they heard another sound.

"It's the motor—the aëroplane man has managed to get going!" exclaimed Rob, instantly comprehending what that meant.

In order to rise, after starting his machine, it was necessary for the aviator to first skim along the field for a little distance, and gradually gain an impetus which, at the proper instant, results in a slow ascent.

Of course he was taking all sorts of desperate chances in making this blind venture; but his life was at stake, if caught. Besides, he undoubtedly must have examined the nature of that level stretch of ground before, and selected it as a landing place on account of its good qualities.

"He's heading this way, Rob!" exclaimed Tubby, almost in a panic.

"If he butts into this wall it'll spell his finish!" added Merritt.

"No danger of that," said Rob. "He knows

every foot of ground around here. But duck down, everybody. They will fire a volley after him, and we might get in line of the bullets."

Tubby dropped flat, forgetting that the high stone wall was as good a breastwork as any one could want.

Just as Rob had anticipated, there was a series of explosions, and they could even hear the patter of bullets striking the piled-up stones composing the wall.

This was enough to tell them that the fleeing aviator had headed straight toward the spot where they were crouching. And, as the rattle of his machine grew louder, they realized that he was approaching them with considerable speed.

Then, with an additional clatter, the Taube passed over the wall, clearing its top by not more than ten feet.

"Keep down!" exclaimed Rob, feeling Merritt beginning to make a move, and afraid lest he should stand upright in order to better follow the progress of the aëroplane.

It was well he spoke when he did, for another burst of firing came. The soldiers were sending

random volleys after the fleeing airman, in hopes of injuring his machinery or wounding the aviator himself.

"That was sure a great getaway!" bubbled Tubby, still seated there on the ground.

"But I rather think they winged him," added Merritt, possibly with a note of regret in his voice.

It was not that he felt any particular sympathy for the German cause; but, boy-like, he could admire grit and daring, no matter under what flag it might be found. That bold flight of the Taube operator in the face of the flying missiles was quite enough to arouse the spirit of any one with red blood in his veins.

"What makes you say that?" asked Tubby, not meaning to remain in ignorance when he possessed a ready tongue.

"I was pretty sure the machine wabbled as it passed over," said Merritt.

"My opinion, too," Rob chimed in. "It seemed to me he was trying his best to get it to mount, but it balked. That could only mean something

had gone wrong with the machinery, or else a wing had been fractured."

"Huh! you talk just like the machine might be a baseball pitcher," commented Tubby. "But, if that's the case, the chances are he'll drop to the ground right away, or else smash up against some tree."

"Just what may happen to him," agreed Merritt.

"You'll notice that the sound of motor and propeller has suddenly died out," suggested Rob, "which I take it looks pretty rough for the man-bird."

"Oh! that would be too bad, now!" Tubby whimpered, as he imagined he could see the bold pilot of the crippled flier dashed to the ground amidst the wreckage of his machine.

"Well, the shooting seems to be over!" remarked Merritt.

"I wonder what happened to the spy?" Rob observed, as he stared over the top of the stone wall toward the spot where the late confusion had taken place.

They could still see that little glow, proving

that the lantern had not been kicked over in all the riot when the creeping Belgians had pounced on the enemy.

"Would it be wise for us to head over there now, Rob?"

Plainly Merritt was curious to know what had happened, and his manner of putting this question to the patrol leader showed that he would never be satisfied unless they made some sort of attempt to solve the mystery.

This time he found Rob more agreeable. Conditions had changed considerably since the leader had put his foot down upon any suggestion that they thrust themselves into the game. The Belgians were their friends, and they could not believe any danger was to be feared from that source.

"We might walk over that way," Rob admitted slowly; "that is, if Tubby can get over this wall."

"If not, he could wait for us here," suggested Merritt, with a chuckle.

"I see myself waiting all alone on the other side of the wall, while you two step forward and

find out all there is going on. I can climb walls, all right, if somebody only gives me a little boost. Try me, and see, Rob. That's a good fellow!"

Of course Rob was ready to lend the desired assistance; and as Tubby secured a hold on a large stone that crowned the wall, he was able to hunch himself up, puffing and grunting at a great rate.

It was easy enough to get down, if one did not care how he fell; but Tubby proved fortunate in finding toe places where he could secure a hold, and in some fashion managed to "dismount."

He pattered after his two chums, who were already moving toward the middle of the big field.

Rob, always noticing things as he went along, found that the field was very level, and he could understand how the place must have been selected for a rendezvous since it offered such exceptional facilities for an aëroplane to land and start up again.

Perhaps this had been a regular nightly affair, and all sorts of valuable information may

have been carried to the German Headquarters by means of this novel air route.

As the three boys gradually drew nearer the place where the lantern could still be seen, they discovered that it was now being held in the hand of some person who wore a uniform.

"Belgians, all right!" muttered Rob, after noting that the garb was not like the khaki-colored clothes of the British troops, nor yet the blue and red of the French soldiers.

There seemed to be more than a dozen of the men, showing that they had come in force. Whether they had discovered the spy by accident or followed him to the place of meeting, Rob, of course, could only guess; nor did it matter to him.

"I can see the prisoner!" whispered Merritt.

"Yes, and there seem to be two of them," added Rob, noting that the men were being held by several soldiers, and it was as though the officer in command might be questioning them closely, for a voice could be heard speaking in French.

"They've been up against hard knocks, it looks like," Tubby mentioned, eager to let his chums

know he was close at their heels, and able to see a few things for himself.

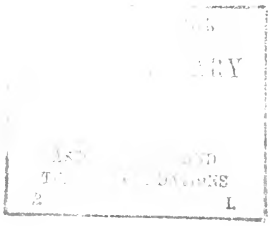
Indeed, the men did have the appearance of having been through the mill. Their hats were missing, so that their hair hung about their faces, which looked as if they had been brought in contact with a pile-driver, for there was blood, also contusions and bruises visible.

"And one of them stands as if he hadn't any use for his left leg, which means most likely he's got a bullet through it," Rob continued.

He spoke aloud, and for a reason. It were better that the soldiers in the field learned of their advance by some such method as this. If, on the other hand, the trio of scouts were detected advancing in any sort of suspicious manner they might be unfortunate enough to evoke a volley. Excited men sometimes shoot first and ask questions afterward.

A harsh voice suddenly demanded in French to know who they were, and what they had to say for themselves; adding that unless they replied instantly the order to cut them down would be given.

"Advance, and hold up your hands above your heads!" he ordered.—*Page* 149.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIELD HOSPITAL.

"We are friends, three American boys only!"

Very often Rob had practiced his French so as to get this explanation correct. If his accent happened to be altogether wrong, what he said could be understood, and that was the main thing.

Apparently, what he had called out must have surprised the Belgian officer in charge of the detachment, for he could be heard exchanging comments with someone else. Then he spoke aloud again.

"Advance, and hold up your hands above your heads!" he ordered.

Rob understood the words, but of course his chums could not; so the first thing he did was to elevate both hands as high as he could, and say to them:

"Do the same as I am, both of you. The officer

has ordered it. And then come on over to where they are waiting for us!"

In this manner they drew near the spot where the others stood. Everyone was staring very hard, for to see three boys dressed in khaki, and talking unmistakable English among themselves, was indeed a considerable surprise.

The one who held the lantern proved to be a lieutenant. He was a man of middle age, and as the newcomers drew near he held up his light in order the better to examine their make-up. What he saw must have created a good impression, for the frown began to leave his face.

"It is fortunate that I speak English," he started in to say, greatly to the delight as well as the surprise of Rob, "so you shall tell me how it comes we find you here on this particular night, and so close to a spot where a suspicious transaction was going on which we had the pleasure of nipping in the bud."

Apparently the lieutenant was not wholly satisfied. He could not tell but that these smart looking boys might have some connection with

the game he and his detachment had blocked in the capture of the two spies.

So Rob hastened to explain as briefly as he could.

"We have come to Belgium on some very important business that has nothing whatever to do with the war. There is a man we must see, and it happens that he was last reported in a town near Brussels. We know what great risks we run in trying to pass between the lines of the hostile armies; but we hope to keep out of the hands of the Germans; and as for the Belgians, we are carrying with us a letter that has up to now always passed us."

This was the signal for Merritt to produce the passport written for them by the obliging burgomaster of Antwerp. The lieutenant received the paper gravely. He was evidently puzzled to know how much of Rob's strange story to believe; for it seemed remarkable that three boys should take such a dangerous mission upon their shoulders.

When he had read the short recommendation through, and saw the signature at the bottom,

the officer uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"You could not have chosen a better sponsor than the worthy burgomaster of Antwerp," he said warmly. "I have met him more than once, and he is held in high respect throughout the land, as is Burgomaster Max of Brussels. Let me return your paper safely. It is worth keeping."

"And you will allow us to go on when we choose, then?" asked Merritt eagerly.

"There is no occasion for your detention," he was informed, "but if I sought your best welfare I should order that you turn back, and give up this foolish mission, for there is hardly one chance in ten that you can escape capture at the hands of the enemy, since they are everywhere. But you know best, and I shall not interfere. It must be a serious motive that brings you into this wretched country?"

"It means a great lot to my family that I find this man, Steven Meredith," Merritt told him, possibly with a faint hope that the lieutenant

might recognize the name, and admit that he knew the person.

Rob had noticed several things. For one, that the taller prisoner was certainly badly wounded, since he stood on one leg, and had his teeth tightly clinched as if to keep from betraying any weakness that might be deemed unmanly.

One of the Belgians also carried a bandage, roughly fastened, possibly by a clumsy comrade, around his arm. It showed traces of blood, and Rob could guess that a speeding bullet fired by the spies at bay probably had caused the wound.

"I notice that a couple of men here have been wounded," he ventured to say to the lieutenant, "and, as you must know, Boy Scouts are taught something of field surgery. Would you mind if I and my friend here looked at them? We might stop the flow of blood, anyway, and perhaps make the men a bit easier."

The Belgian officer hesitated for a brief time. He looked at Rob, and seemed to be considering. Then he nodded his head.

"As we have to stay here until my superior

officer and a larger detachment come along in answer to the signals we are about to make, it could do no harm. Yes, I have heard that Boy Scouts are supposed to know something of surgery, although I myself have never seen them practice it. You may proceed. Albert!"

He beckoned to the private who had his arm bound up. The man upon being told to show his injury hardly knew what was about to happen. He could not believe that mere boys would know what a surgeon was supposed to do.

That man evidently had the surprise of his life when Rob, assisted by Merritt, washed the wound by the aid of some water obtained from a canteen, and then neatly bound the arm up, using some strips from a little roll of linen which Rob took from his pocket.

The officer watched the whole operation with considerable interest.

"That was neatly done," he commented, after the man had stepped back to where a comrade was holding his gun for him. "As you expressed a wish to attend to the prisoner, I give you full permission to do so. Though, after all, it will

make but little difference with him, since his doom is sealed."

The tall German said never a word, but allowed the boys to do as they willed with him. He realized the desperate condition in which his boldness had placed him and was evidently determined, if convicted of being a spy, to die game.

His injury turned out to be much more serious than that of the Belgian soldier, for the bullet had made a bad puncture, and he had already lost much blood.

Tubby turned his head away at first, as though he could not bear to see the wound, but evidently realizing that a display of such timidity was hardly in keeping with what they wished these men to believe of Boy Scouts, he finally forced himself to offer to assist his chums in their gruesome work.

It took all of ten minutes to wash and dress that wound with the few things at their command the best they were able to. During all that time the spy did not say a word, nor did he groan

even when Rob knew he must be hurting him more or less, although that could not be avoided.

And the officer had commenced to ask questions. It seemed to surprise him that even in far-away America there, too, the boys had organized themselves into patrols and learned all these valuable lessons calculated to make them better citizens when they came to take their places in business, on the firing line, or among the professions.

"Then the scouts over in your country are also taught to be ready for any emergency, the same as the boys are in Belgium?" he asked Rob, as he watched the latter's nimble fingers, with considerable dexterity into the bargain, draw the bandage tightly into place.

"Oh! yes," replied the boy, only too pleased to say a good word for the thousands upon thousands of comrades in khaki whom he represented. "You see, most of us camp out a good deal, and all sorts of accidents happen. I've known a boy to cut himself so badly with an ax when he was chopping wood that he would have bled to death long before they could get him to a doctor, but

it was easy for his mates to stop the flow of blood, and do the right thing."

"It is grand, this teaching boys to be able to save human life," declared the middle-aged officer, who perhaps had sons of his own in the army, "and yet it never came to me before that even in America they were practicing these noble avocations. I have seen them in England, yes, in France also, but in America—it is superb to think of it. And there are other ways in which boys in camp could be injured, you are telling me?"

He had become so deeply interested that Rob only too willingly proceeded to explain at greater length.

"Why, sometimes a boy is taken with a cramp when in swimming, and of course he is saved by those who know just how to get him without being pulled down themselves."

"And," continued the Belgian lieutenant, "if the poor fellow should be nearly gone, what then? I myself once had a narrow escape that way, and to this day it gives me a cold feeling every time I remember it."

"Oh! every scout, even when he's a tenderfoot, is supposed to learn how to resuscitate a comrade who has swallowed lots of water, and come near drowning. Unless he was pulled out too late, he will be brought back every time. Then there are the bites from poisonous snakes and insects that may happen; we are taught how best to counteract the effect of poison, so as to save the victim."

"I am delighted to know all this," the officer told them. "It has been quite a pleasure to have met you, although under peculiar conditions, I admit. And the more I see of you, young messieurs, the more I am convinced that you can look out for yourselves. At first I considered it was a shame that three tender boys were allowed to travel over this dangerous country. I no longer feel that way. If anybody should know how to take care of themselves, I surely believe you know, and are equal to do it. I am proud to shake hands with you, and wish you all a successful journey."

Which operation he proceeded to immediately put into execution; though Tubby, having had

one previous experience with a hearty Belgian hand-grip, was mighty careful just how he allowed the other to take hold of his plump digits.

Rob was quite satisfied now that they had done the right thing in coming forward and joining the party. At least it had been the means of easing the pain of those who were wounded, and stopping the flow of blood sensibly.

The German had actually broken his silence to thank the boys when they finished their work. It was evident, however, that he was not caring very much what happened to him, since he knew the probable penalty for allowing himself to be captured in the act of delivering important plans of fortifications—death.

None of the boys so much as mentioned the fact that they believed the Taube machine might have been injured, and even fallen a short distance away. If the Belgians did not see fit to investigate conditions, it was no part of the scouts' business to put them on the track. The dashing aviator deserved to get away, Rob thought, and it would hardly be fair for out-

siders, who had really no interest in the matter, to betray him to his enemies.

So they left the soldiers still waiting for their comrades to come along with a superior officer in charge. The lieutenant had taken quite a sudden fancy for Rob and his two chums; but then that was not strange, Tubby told himself, since the patrol leader always had a knack of making friends wherever he went.

They soon arrived at the stone wall, and to Tubby's satisfaction found a break where they could actually pass to the road without once more climbing the barrier.

The last they saw of the field was when the lighted lantern was being waved in a way that looked as though the lieutenant might be signaling to others. In the opposite quarter only darkness was to be seen. Rob wondered what had become of the operator of the Taube aëroplane; whether he had indeed come crashing to the earth, or managed to sail away to safety. But they were never fated to know.

CHAPTER XV.

CHASING A JACK-O'-LANTERN.

"I wish you could tell me we were nearly at that old village, Rob. Seems to me we've been trudging along for hours, and I own up to feeling just a little bit tired."

Tubby had a beseeching way about him that was hard to resist; and so Rob really felt sorry that he could give him no joyful news.

"I would like to be able to tell in the worst way, Tubby," he told him, "but you see we're making this turn only on hearsay. None of us knows a single thing about it. There must be some sort of a place ahead of us, because several times I've heard dogs barking, and I even thought I could hear people calling."

"It's all right, Tubby," chimed in Merritt, "because there's a light, yes,—two, three of the same kind. We'll soon be there, and I hope we'll

find some sort of a bunk, even if we have to drop in the hay."

"That's what I say," the fat scout declared energetically, bracing up, now that it seemed the haven might be in sight. "I could sleep standing up, I believe, if only you braced me on the sides."

"I believe you," remarked Merritt; and Tubby hardly knew whether he ought to demand an explanation of that insinuation or not; he finally concluded to change the subject.

They soon found they had arrived at another of those frequent little Belgian hamlets where, in the past, thrift had held sway, but which were rapidly becoming demoralized under the pressure of the war fever. Most of the men were serving the colors, of course, those remaining being the very aged or crippled, the women, and always the flocks of children.

"Seems to me they're carrying on kind of queer here, as if something might be going on," Merritt hazarded while they were approaching the border of the place.

"Gingersnaps and popguns!" exclaimed Tub-

by, "I hope there isn't a bunch of those terrible Uhlans in town, smashing things, and threatening to burn every house unless the wine and the ransom money are brought out!"

"Let's go slow till we can make sure about that," suggested Rob.

Their recent unpleasant experience was so fresh in their minds that they did not care to have it duplicated. The next time they might not be so fortunate about escaping from a burning inn, or avoiding capture at the hands of raiding Uhlans.

"I don't seem to glimpse any cavalrymen around, do you, Rob?" Merritt questioned, as they hovered on the outskirts of the place, ready to melt away in the darkness should any peril arise.

"No, and it's safe for us to push on," the patrol leader announced.

"But there are a raft of people around," ventured the cautious Tubby, who had been closely observing each and every soul, as though he suspected that crafty Uhlans might be hidden under

peasants' garb, or in the clothes of the stout Belgian dames.

"Well, a lot of them are fugitives, the same as those we've been seeing on the roads all day long," Rob explained. "Some of them have been burned out of house and home; but in the main they're people who have believed all these awful fairy stories about the terrible Germans, and think that if they stay they'll be eaten up."

"This place must have escaped a visit from the Germans so far," Merritt suggested, "and they are coming to believe it's a lucky town, which would account for so many stopping here in their rush to get away."

"That's bad!" muttered Tubby.

"Why is it?" demanded Merritt.

"All the spare beds will be taken, you see," explained the other dejectedly, "and those who come late, like we are doing, must sit up all night, or else sleep in the dog kennel or the pigsty or the barn. Well, I said before and I mean it, if I can have some hay under me to keep my bones from the floor, I won't complain, or make a single kick. I'm easily satisfied, you all know."

"That must be the village inn, over yonder, Rob," Merritt remarked, pointing as he spoke. "Judging from the crowd in front we've got a poor show to get beds for to-night."

"Everybody stares at us as if they thought we might be some kind of wild animal," Tubby complained.

"Well, I can see that they've had some sort of circus here lately because the showbills are still posted on the fences," Merritt observed with a chuckle, "and can you blame them for thinking that the side shows have bust up, with the freaks hiking all through the country, unable to ride on the railroads, which are all taken over by the Government to haul cannon, horses and soldiers? I'll pass for the Living Skeleton, while you could stand for the Fat Boy, Tubby!"

Tubby was so used to having his friends joke at him on account of his chubby build that as a rule he let such reminders pass by without showing any ill feeling. In this instance he hardly noticed what Merritt was saying, because so many other events were happening around them.

Being satisfied at last that they were in no

apparent danger from concealed Uhlans, Tubby felt his spirits rise once more.

At the inn Rob entered into a brief conversation with the proprietor. As this worthy knew very little French, and Rob next to nothing of Flemish, the "confab," as Tubby called it, had to be conducted mostly through a series of shrugs and gestures.

"What luck, Rob?" asked Tubby, when the other chum turned to them again.

"He's cram full of sleepers to-night, and couldn't give us even a cot," explained Rob. "When I said we'd put up with the hay, he gave me to understand we could pick out any place found unoccupied."

"Gee whiz! 'unoccupied,' you said, didn't you, Rob?" cried Tubby hastily. "Now, does that mean the place is apt to be *swarming* with these peasant women and children, and shall we have to listen to babies bawling all night long, not to speak of roosters crowing, dogs barking, horses neighing, pigs grunting and cows mooing?"

"'Beggars should never be choosers,' they say," Merritt warned him.

"And, after all, let's hope it won't be quite so bad as all that," said Rob.

They sought the stable. It was in the rear of the inn, and a rather decent looking structure in the bargain.

"Why, this isn't half bad," admitted Tubby, as they entered and found that the kind proprietor of the house had hung up a lighted lantern, by means of which it was possible for the boys to see the stack of hay.

"It smells like a sweet new crop," Rob remarked, glad to find something to commend when surrounded by such dismal prospects.

"And so far as I can see we're the only barn guests," Tubby announced jubilantly as he started to burrow in the hay.

He had hardly made much progress before he came backing out in a hurry.

"There's a great big dog sleeping in there!" he declared excitedly.

"What makes you think so?" asked Rob, who could hardly believe it possible.

"I tell you he tried to bite me," urged Tubby, holding up one finger of his right hand, and on which a tiny speck of blood was visible.

"Shucks! you only stuck it on a thorn, that's all!" protested the unbelieving Merritt, "and I'll prove it by crawling in the same hole."

"Look out, now!" warned Tubby, anxious, and yet with some eagerness, for he hoped to have his words proved in a fashion even Merritt could not doubt.

Immediately there was more or less excitement in the hay; and then came the unmistakable scolding of a setting hen. Merritt backed out, laughing.

"There's your ferocious bulldog!" he told Tubby; "but we'll leave old Biddy to her eggs, and try another place. Plenty of room in this hotel without chucking the other guests out of their nests."

After a while they made themselves comfortable. Tubby, before turning in, had prowled around a little. He told the others that as a true scout he was only taking an inventory of his surroundings, so that if there should happen to

come a sudden midnight alarm he at least would know what to do in order to lead the way out of the barn by a rear exit.

"Smart boy, Tubby," Merritt told him, when he heard him say this; and it always pleased the fat scout to receive a word of praise, possibly because the occasions when he deserved any were few and far between.

They lay in the sweet hay, and talked in low tones. No one else seemed to be pushed so hard for a place to sleep as to come to the barn, for which all of the chums professed to be very grateful.

In the course of the conversation, which had more or less bearing on their strange mission abroad, the subject of the precious paper came to the front. Perhaps it was Merritt himself who mentioned it, because the matter was frequently in his thoughts, and he seemed to be growing more and more anxious, the nearer they drew to the place where he anticipated finding Steven Meredith.

"You've never really told us who this man is, Merritt, and how he comes to be wandering

around the world with a paper belonging to your grandfather hidden away under the lining of the case containing his field-glasses," Rob remarked while Tubby, who had just been yawning, sat up and seemed to be wide awake again.

"That's a fact, Merritt," he chimed in. "If you don't object, why, we'd like to be told."

"The fact of the matter is," replied Merritt, "I don't know a great deal more than you do, come to think of it. Grandfather Crawford comes from old Scotch stock, so he's a canny sort of an old gentleman. No use of my telling you about the way he treated my father when he was a young man and married against the wishes of his parents, because that you already know. It's about the paper, also of Steven Meredith you're curious to hear?"

"Yes, go along, please," begged Tubby.

"The paper is a little scrap, he told me, on which are marked certain directions as how to find a certain rich gold mine out in our Southwest country. Grandfather has one-half his paper, and the other half is lodged in the cover of

that field-glass case—if the man is still carrying it with him."

"That gets more and more queer, I must say," grumbled Tubby, looking as though he could not untangle the knot that was presented to him.

"Yes, if anybody had told it to me," admitted Merritt, "I'd have made up my mind right away he was trying to pull the wool over my eyes with a silly yarn. And yet there was Grandfather Crawford just as sober as you ever saw anyone, and vouching for every word of it as true."

"Well, how on earth did the half of the map or the directions happen to get in that field-glass case, without Steven Meredith, who carries the same, knowing a thing about it?" asked Rob.

"This deposit was discovered by an old miner who never worked it, but had samples of wonderfully rich ore, which he showed my grandfather at the time he was rescued by my relative from being tortured by a couple of halfbreeds who wanted to get the miner's secret. He gave grandfather the half of the map, and directions he had on his person, and told him where he would find the other half."

"Now it's beginning to look understandable," Tubby admitted. "The old miner did that so if anybody got hold of him they wouldn't be able to locate the secret mine—wasn't that it, Merritt?"

"Just what he had in mind," the other told him, "and of course the injuries received in the fight carried the miner off eventually, leaving my grandfather as his sole heir, if he could only lay hands on the other half of that valuable little paper, for neither portion alone made any sense.

"Gee! this is getting real interesting—if true!" ventured Tubby.

"Oh! it's a straight yarn, never fear," retorted Merritt without any trace of ill feeling, however, for no one ever could quarrel with Tubby. "And just about here is where this man Steven Meredith, as he calls himself, breaks into the story. The old miner had told my grandfather that for security he kept the other half of the chart, and the directions how to find the treasure, hidden in the lining of the case holding a pair of field-glasses that he had carried for years, as they were of a special make and considered extra fine."

"And when your esteemed relative came to make a hunt for the said glasses," remarked Tubby, anxious to show that he was following the narrative closely, "why of course he found that Steve had got away with them—is that the stuff, Merritt?"

"Great head, Tubby," chuckled the other, as if amused at this unexpected smartness on the part of the stout boy. "You've said it, after a fashion; for that was what really happened. The glasses were supposed, along with other things owned by the old miner, to be in the charge of an old and invalid sister in a small town. To that place my grandfather went, armed with a paper which would give him possession of the traps of the dead man, including the case with the glasses. And that was where he came up against a staggering disappointment.

"It seemed that this sister of the miner was a little queer in her head. When a visitor chanced to examine the glasses, and offered her a pretty fine sum for them, she, not knowing how her brother valued them because of their as-

sociation with his prospecting life, thought it a good chance to dispose of some useless property.

"And so the wonderful half of the chart was gone. My grandfather took enough interest in the matter to learn that a man by the name of Steven Meredith possessed the glasses. He even started a search for him, thinking that he might be able to buy the glasses back, so as to satisfy his mind about the worth of the chart.

"Later on he learned that some valuable ore had been struck in the region where the secret mine of the dead prospector was said to be located. This kept making him take more and more interest in the finding of Steven and the lost paper. He became absorbed in the hunt, and in the end had three men on the track.

"They traced Meredith across the ocean. All sorts of strange rumors came back as to what he really was. Once it was even said that he was secretly in the pay of the German Government. Anyway, he went to Berlin, and was known to meet with certain men high up in the Secret Service there.

"Just a little while ago my grandfather re-

ceived positive word from one of his agents that Steven Meredith was stationed in a Belgian town, though what his business there could be was a mystery. This little town was an obscure one near Brussels, where he could keep in the background. Its name is Sempst; and that's where we are headed now."

"But just explain one queer thing, won't you, please, Merritt?" asked Tubby.

"I know what you're going to say," replied the other. "Of course you're wondering why my relative didn't wire his agent about the glasses, and offer him a good sum to get them, with the case. Well, the fact is he didn't have as much faith in his agents as all that."

"You mean that if the man knew he valued the article so much he would begin to smell a rat, and perhaps examine the lining of the case himself, after he had managed to steal or buy the glasses?" suggested Rob.

"That's what he had in mind," Merritt continued. "So he hardly knew what to do, or whom to trust, until I asked him to send me, and let me have you along. They didn't like the idea

of us boys starting over here when things were so upset; but grandfather believes Boy Scouts can do almost anything. So it came about. And in a nutshell that's the strange story."

"Gee! you'd think it a page from the *Arabian Nights,*" Tubby declared. "But queer things can happen to-day just as much as ever. I only hope that if we do manage to rake in that old field-glass case, and the paper is still nestling underneath the lining, it doesn't turn out to be a pipe dream—something that old miner just hatched up to make himself feel he was as rich as a Vanderbilt."

"We'll have to chance that," said Rob. "Our part of the business will be done when we carry the case back to Merritt's grandfather. It's up to him for the rest. But don't you think we'd better try and get to sleep, for it's growing late?"

They determined that this was a wise suggestion, and shortly afterward not only Tubby and Merritt, but Rob as well had lost all realization of trouble and stress in sound slumber.

The night passed, and with the coming of

dawn the boys were astir. Nothing had apparently happened during the night to disturb them.

In the morning hens were beginning to cackle, and cows to low, as the boys awoke and crawled from the hay. A few minutes later, at a nearby pump, they washed the last bit of drowsiness from their eyes; after which they began to think, from the pleasant odors in the air, that it was nearly time for breakfast.

"I dreamed about that grand paper hunt you told us about, Merritt," Tubby announced, as with his chums he sauntered over to the inn to see what chance there was for getting something to eat. "And talk to me about your will-o'-the-wisps, or what they call jack-o'-lanterns, such as flit around graveyards or damp places nights, that certainly did beat the record. Lots of times I was just stretching out my hand to grab it when I'd hear a laugh, and Steve, he'd snatch the old field-glass case away. I woke up still on the trail, and as set as ever to win out."

"Let's hope that will prove to be the case with us," ventured Rob cheerily.

They found that they were to be given break-

fast; and as all of the boys had a ferocious appetite they soon did justice to the meal set before them.

It was while they were finishing that they suddenly became aware of the fact that something along the line of a battle had broken out not a great ways off. The first intimation they had of this was the deep-throated sound of a heavy gun. It made them jump; and the entire village seemed to become aroused at once, as people began to run this way and that, chattering like magpies, some of their faces turning white with apprehension of what was to come.

They had heard of the fate of Louvain, and dreaded the hour when the German army should come sweeping with irresistible force across that section of the country.

Quick on the heels of that opening gun came other sounds—the long roll of rifle firing in volleys, and the faint cheers of charging men. The boys even fancied they could hear amidst all the confusion the loud singing that was said to mark the advance of the German legions as they went into battle chanting the "Watch on the Rhine."

Rob could well believe it, for he knew singing was to the Teuton mind what the bagpipes meant to Scotch Highlanders, or cheers to American boys in khaki.

It was evident that the gallant little Belgian army, determined to resist to the uttermost the passage of the Germans across their territory in the direction of Antwerp and Ghent, had again given battle to overwhelming numbers.

Of course the boys had rushed out of the inn and immediately sought the best position from which they could see something of what was going on. Many of the villagers were clustered there, gazing with deepest concern at the section where the smoke of battle was beginning to spread like a pall over the country.

"Oh! what is that up there, and heading this way?" Tubby suddenly exclaimed.

No sooner had Rob turned his gaze aloft than he was able to give the desired information.

"That is one of the famous German Zeppelins, hovering over the battlefield," he told Tubby.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BATTLE FOR THE TRENCHES.

By this time everyone was gazing in mixed wonder and awe at the strange dirigible balloon, speeding in great circles far up toward the clouds.

Rob and his comrades had read more or less about these monster airships which the German Count had invented, and which were expected to play a prominent part in this world war. They had even hoped that before they left Belgium they might be given an opportunity to see one of the fleet monsters, which were said to be able to carry dozens of men, as well as tons of explosives, incredible distances.

In Antwerp there had been considerable talk concerning the possibility of these Zeppelins making a concerted attack on the city, and forcing its surrender. All manner of fearful stories were going the rounds, and many timid people

had even left the city on the Scheldt for the more hospitable shores of England, just on account of the threatening peril from the clouds.

"So, that's a real Zeppelin, is it?" Tubby remarked, as they stood there with their eyes riveted on the flittering monster of the air.

"No question about it," Merritt told him, "because the poor Belgians don't own such an expensive airship, though they have some aëroplanes, I was told."

"But what do you reckon they're doing up there?" asked Tubby, still seeking to increase his limited stock of knoweldge.

"Why," Rob replied, "don't you see there's a battle going on below, and from that height men with glasses can see every little thing that's happening. They are able to tell how the Belgian forces are intrenched; and by means of signals let their gunners know where to drop shells so as to do the most harm."

"Whee! what won't they do next in modern, up-to-date fighting?" exclaimed Tubby.

"There have been lots of remarkable surprises sprung in this war already," Merritt observed

thoughtfully, "but I'm thinking tne worst is yet to come. There never was such a war before in the history of the world, and it's to be hoped this one ends in a peace that will last forever."

"Yes," added Rob, greatly impressed by what he was seeing, "war's going to cost so much after this that the nations will have to fix up some other way to settle their differences. About that Zeppelin, Tubby; don't you see how they might be able to drop a few bombs on the enemy's trenches; or where the Belgians have fixed barbed-wire entanglements to stop the rush of the charging German troops? Just to think that here we are really watching a battle that isn't like one of the sham fights they have every summer at home. It's hard to believe, boys!"

They were all agreed as to this, and every little while one of them might be detected actually rubbing his eyes, as though suspecting he were asleep and all this were but a feverish dream.

The cannonading grew more and more furious as the morning advanced. Huge billows of smoke covered sections of the country, some of

it not more than a mile away from the village where Rob and his chums had stopped.

"And just to think," said Tubby, with a touch of sorrow in his voice. "While all this sounds like a Fourth of July celebration to us, safe as we are, it spells lots of terrible wounds for the poor fellows who are in the fight. Why, with all those big shells bursting, and the shrapnel too, that you spoke about, Rob, right now I reckon there are just hundreds of them wanting to be attended to."

"That's true enough, Tubby, the more the pity," replied Rob.

"What's this coming up behind us?" called out Merritt, as loud cheers, together with the rattle of wheels and the pounding of many horses' hoofs, were heard on the road they had used on the previous night.

"Oh! they're going to bombard the village; and now we'll get it!" gasped Tubby.

"It looks like a battery coming from the direction of Antwerp, and hurrying to get in action!" Rob ventured to say, as he discovered

that those who were seated on the horses and on the gun caissons wore the Belgian uniforms.

"Just what it is, Rob," added Merritt excitedly. "They hear the sound of the guns ahead, and are crazy to get there. Look at them whip the horses, would you! And how the animals run! They smell the smoke of burnt powder, and it's fairly set them all wild!"

It was indeed a stirring sight to see that battery come tearing along straight through the little village, and heading directly toward the place where the flashing and roaring of battle seemed fiercest.

The men were all keyed up to a pitch of excitement that made them forget they were about to face danger and death. They shouted as they swept past, and the poor villagers, filled with a momentary enthusiasm, sent back answering cries.

Such enthusiasm is always contagious. Why, even peace-loving Tubby seemed to be infected with some of it. His eyes glowed, and his breath came in short puffs, as he watched the guns and caissons go whirling along until men, horses and

all had vanished down the road in a cloud of dust.

"Some of those brave fellows will never come back again, I'm afraid," said Tubby sadly.

"It begins to look as if the artillery arm was going to be everything in this war," Rob remarked, as though the sight of those bursting shells impressed him.

"But what do you suppose all that bombardment means?" Merritt asked.

"I can only give a guess," the patrol leader replied. "From all I've read I get the idea that before the Germans order a charge of their infantry they pour in a heavy bombardment from every big gun they can get in line. That makes it so hot in the trenches that the enemy has to keep under cover. Then the infantry manages to get a good start before they are fired on."

"Nothing new about that, I guess," replied Merritt. "It was done in the battle of Gettysburg, where Lee used more than a hundred cannon to bombard, before starting to carry Little Round-top and Cemetery Hill by assault. I was just reading about it a few weeks ago in a maga-

zine article at home. But if those are their tactics, Rob, we ought to be seeing some movement of troops pretty soon."

"Yes," the patrol leader admitted, "the gun fire is slackening right now; and if we had glasses I expect we could see the infantry starting forward. Those up in the Zeppelin can watch every move that takes place."

"All the same I'd rather take my chances down here," Tubby announced.

"What's that moving away over there, Rob?" demanded Merritt. "Seems like a gray looking snake creeping out from the shelter of the woods. I declare if I don't believe it is a mass of men charging straight at the Belgian trenches!"

"The Germans all wear a sort of grayish green uniform, you know," Tubby declared, "which is so like the dirt that lots of times you can't tell the soldiers from the earth half a mile away."

"Look sharp, fellows," said Rob, "because that is where they're going to shoot their bolt. What we see is a battalion of infantry charging. Now watch how they begin to gather momentum.

Yes, and when the gun fire lets up we'll hear the voices of thousands of men singing as they rush forward, ready to die for the Fatherland."

They stood there with trembling limbs, and continued to watch what was developing right before their eyes. It seemed as though that gray mass would never cease coming into view. The whole open space was covered with lines upon lines of soldiers all pushing in one direction, and that where the intrenchments of the Belgians must lie.

"Oh! look! look! they're opening on them with quick-fire guns, and all sorts of things!" Tubby exclaimed, in absolute horror. "Why, I can see lanes cut in the lines of the Germans; but they always close up, and keep right on! Isn't it terrible?"

"It is sublime!" said Rob; and that tribute to the unflinching bravery of the German advance was about the limit of a boy's vocabulary.

"But the plucky little Belgians won't yield an inch of ground, you see!" cried Merritt. "They keep pouring in that terrible fire, and mowing

the Germans down, just like they were cutting wheat on a Minnesota farm."

"How will it all end, I wonder?" said Rob, fascinated, more than he would have believed possible, by the panorama that was being unfolded before his eyes.

"If the ammunition of the Belgian batteries and Maxims holds out," ventured Merritt, "there won't be any German army left in this part of the country. Their best troops are said to be down in France now, fighting the Allies; but if these are only second or third class reserves, I wonder what the really top-notch ones can do in a battle."

"They're weakening, let me tell you!" Rob startled the others by saying. "Watch and you'll see that they don't advance as fast as before. Perhaps the general in charge has found that the trenches can't be taken by a direct charge. They're going to fall back, and let the artillery start in again! The first part of the terrible battle is over, for there the Germans begin to scatter, and run, to get out of range of the Maxims!"

"And the plucky Belgians have won again!" Merritt declared as though almost tempted to join in the cries of satisfaction that were beginning to rise from those of the villagers who were clustered close by, intensely interested spectators of the thrilling spectacle just enacted.

"And there's that old Zeppelin still swinging around up in the sky," remarked Tubby. "For all the information they were able to signal down, the Germans couldn't take the Belgian trenches. When they got the wire entanglements they were blocked."

"But unless I miss my guess," exclaimed Merritt, "the Zeppelin will have to get on the run pretty quick or it'll find there's a little war brewing in the sky, because I can see a couple of aëroplanes rising from back of the Belgian lines!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BADGE OF COURAGE AND MERCY.

"It seems like we were to be treated to about everything there is going in the way of up-to-date fighting!" said Tubby, who was having some difficulty in craning his fat neck, to look toward where the wonderful airship was still making enormous circles above the battle lines.

"Are you sure they are Belgian aëroplanes?" asked Merritt, who had been attentively observing the ascending fliers.

"They came up from behind the line of trenches," replied Rob, "and that makes it look as if they couldn't be German machines. Besides, the invaders all use a model that is called a Taube, which is different from these."

"But why d'ye suppose they didn't climb up before now, and tackle that monster Zeppelin, so as to put it out of business, or chase it off?" inquired Tubby.

"They had their reasons, I suppose," he was told by the patrol leader. "No matter what they may have been, we're not interested. It's enough for us to watch what's going to happen from now on."

"I'll be jiggered if the Zeppelin isn't going to have it out with them!" exclaimed Merritt. "Did you see that little puff of what looked like smoke? They've got some sort of gun aboard, and mean to try and riddle the aëroplanes with it!"

"Whew! talk to me about excitement, this has got everything I ever knew beaten by a mile!" admitted Tubby.

"You notice that both the monoplanes manage to keep pretty far away from the dirigible," Rob told them. "And see how they bore up in circles all the while, too, getting higher right along."

"What's the idea of that?" asked Merritt.

"For one thing it'll put them on equal terms with the Zeppelin so that they can send back shot for shot," explained the other. "But unless I miss my guess they mean to try a bigger scheme

than that, if once they can get above the airship."

"You mean drop a bomb down on it, don't you, Rob?" Merritt asked.

"Yes. You know these Zeppelins are made in many sections. They say one could keep afloat even if a dozen of these were smashed. They're along similar lines as the watertight compartments of steamships. Some auto tires are made the same way too. But if a bomb was dropped on top of the gas bag, I reckon the explosion would play hob with the whole business."

They stood there and watched the strange duel in the heavens. The thrill of that occasion would never be forgotten by any one of the three scouts. And all the while the guns over beyond the low-lying hills were beating a terrible tattoo that was like the music of the orchestra when a play is being performed. That tragedy was there above them, the stage being the limitless expanse of the heavens.

The Zeppelin maneuvered again and again in order to get in touch with the wasp-like enemies that constantly darted out of reach. There was

more or less firing going on, the boys could see, even though the distance and the growl of the German artillery prevented them from hearing any reports.

"There, I believe they've done it!" shouted Merritt suddenly.

"The Zeppelin is running away, that's sure!" echoed Tubby, "and one of the aëroplanes seems to be further up, too!"

"Something has happened, because the rear of the dirigible looks as if it had collapsed," Rob announced. "I wonder how they manage to steer, with the rudder useless. But they're coming down fast now, you notice!"

"And aiming so as to bring the monoplanes over the German lines," added Merritt. "If the little fellows know what's good for them, they'll keep a good distance off, because there are guns made that can shoot straight up for a mile, and send a shell or shrapnel to burst, and fetch an aviator every time."

While they watched, the disabled Zeppelin dropped out of sight back of the woods, and it was easily possible for the boys to hear the wild

shouts of derision that ascended from the trenches where the Belgians lay concealed.

The two aëroplanes then started to have a little scout of their own, and doubtless those daring air pilots picked up more or less information that would prove of value to the defenders of the trenches.

"Is the battle over, do you think?" asked Tubby, when this exciting panorama in the upper air currents had come to an end.

"Some of the guns are still muttering," Rob told him, "but they seem to be further away. Perhaps the Germans are bombarding some fortified place off in the distance, or it may be an English army has shown up, and is giving battle to the Kaiser. You know the poor Belgians are hoping for that to happen right along."

"But just think what is over there!" continued Tubby, with a shudder as he pointed a chubby finger toward the scene of the late charge and repulse. "Why, I can see hundreds of men lying around, just like the corn when they go to cutting so it can be stacked. Ugh! it's awful to think of all those poor Germans!"

"They're not all Germans, either," corrected Merritt; "because I saw one place where the Belgians rushed out of their trenches, and fought hand to hand. Lots of them must have been knocked over, too. They just couldn't hold back, I guess, with the fighting spirit in them."

"And this is what's going on all through Belgium, Northern France, and over along the border of Russia," said Rob, powerfully impressed with the tragic scene he had looked upon.

"Here's another battery coming along the road, too late to get in the fight!" they heard Tubby saying.

"That's where you're barking up the wrong tree, Tubby," Merritt assured him, "because what's coming now is just the opposite of a battery. One cuts down the ranks of the enemy, this one helps to bind up their wounds, and carry them off the battlefield! In action the fighting men become like fiends; but I guess you could call these angels of mercy!"

"Why, sure enough, I can see the Red Cross on the wagon!" cried Tubby, evidently pleased by the discovery. "Then that must be an ambu-

lance, and they're going on the battlefield to help the poor wounded fellows! Oh! how much I admire them right now. I wish I was worth a continental as a surgeon, and I'd like to volunteer to help take care of some of the wounded."

"There are three more ambulances, and they seem to have several nurses aboard each one," Rob observed, as the procession advanced closer to where they were located.

"There's a man driving, and I reckon now that may be the surgeon," Merritt was saying, as though deeply interested. "How about this, Rob? I thought nurses only worked in the hospitals back of the lines; but these seem heading right for the battlefield."

"As a rule they let men bring in the wounded," said Rob. "But sometimes a nurse is allowed to go about trying to help the poor fellows as best she can until such time as a stretcher can reach them. Most of them are parched with thirst, and what they ask for first of all is a drink of water."

"I might do that much, anyway," Tubby was heard to mutter to himself, "if only I thought I

could stand the terrible sights. You know, seeing blood always used to make me feel faint-like. But then a scout ought to overcome that weakness."

Possibly it may have been something in what Tubby said that gave Merritt his brilliant idea, for he immediately whirled upon the patrol leader, and exclaimed:

"Rob, why couldn't we ask them to take us along, and let us do what we can to help? As scouts we know something about taking care of wounds, you remember. Why, didn't that officer compliment us on the way we looked after his men, and the German spy they'd captured? Rob, see if we could do it, won't you? It might be a terrible experience for us; but I feel like I'd be better satisfied if I could lend a helping hand here."

The first of the three army ambulances had by this time come close to the boys. Attracted by their khaki uniforms, and possibly their bright eager faces, the man who was driving held up his team. A woman of middle-age, garbed as a nurse, jumped to the ground, and approached

the boys. They saw that undoubtedly she must be the one in charge of the Red Cross detachment.

At sight of the little American flag which Tubby wore on the lapel of his coat her eyes glistened.

"That is a glorious sight to my eyes in this foreign land," she told them, "for I, too, am American-born. My profession is that of a trained nurse. A wealthy patient I brought abroad died in Antwerp; and as the war had broken out I determined to offer my services to the Government, so that I was immediately given a position of trust and responsibility. We are short-handed with men, you can see. I happen to know what Boy Scouts over in America have to learn about taking care of wounded persons. It is a terrible thing to ask, but this is a case of necessity. Would you be willing to help us out; and do you think you could stand the awful sights and sounds of the battlefield?"

Rob and Merritt exchanged glances; while their flushed faces told the nurse what their an-

swer would be, even before they spoke a single word.

"We were just wondering whether you would let us join you," Rob said quickly, "for we want to do something to help those poor fellows over there. Yes, if you can make room for us aboard your ambulance we'll gladly go along."

Poor Tubby had lost all his color. He was as white as a ghost; but with tightly shut teeth he pushed up, to allow the nurse to fasten a bit of muslin, stamped with a vivid red cross, upon his left arm, and then he climbed into the ambulance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER THE FIGHTING WAS OVER.

The horses had been urged on at considerable speed, in order to arrive upon the scene of action, for the animals began to show evidences of exhaustion long before they reached a position back of the Belgian trenches. That may have been one of the reasons why they were halted temporarily, at the time the head nurse talked with the three Boy Scouts.

As they approached the battle line Rob and his friends became intensely interested. They saw the heads of the defenders of the trenches thrust up to observe their coming, and heard the hearty ringing cheers with which the Red Cross nurses were greeted.

Men sprang out to assist them, so that apparently it would be no hard task to find plenty of recruits to handle the stretchers upon which the wounded could be carried to the hastily con-

structed field hospital in the rear, where the surgeons would soon be busily employed.

Tubby was still looking very white, but he had made up his mind that he would go through with this wonderful experience even if he fainted dead away. All that was stubborn in his nature had come to the surface; and Rob, after noticing this, made up his mind Tubby was going to take a long step forward before another sun had set.

Now they were on the other side of the trenches. There was considerable bustle. Nurses commenced to spread out over the field, on which some men lay groaning and others very still.

The assistants with the stretchers, upon whose arms had been fastened badges bearing the sacred red cross, began to carry off such of the wounded as they found needed urgent attention.

"Come on, boys, let's see where we can help out!" said Rob, trying to appear perfectly cool and collected, but at the same time knowing that his knees were inclined to knock together, so that he could not blame poor Tubby for feeling as he did.

They started out. At first all of them stuck together, for the sights they soon saw filled them with a sense of horror, as well as compassion.

Never were Boy Scouts placed in a position where they had more reason to be thankful for what little knowledge of surgery they had attained.

The American nurse may have felt considerable doubt as to whether she had done a wise thing in affording these boys a chance to assist the Red Cross upon the battlefield. Rob saw that she hovered near them, as though keeping an eye on what they did.

It was a dreadful experience for those boys, to be thus brought in close contact with the dead and the dying; they could never forget what they saw there that day.

Even Tubby braced up when he found that he could be useful in helping the others. He had secured a bucket of water, and when he heard some poor fellow cry out, or saw him make frantic gestures, it was his business to hurry over and supply his wants. No matter what uniform the wounded man wore, it did not make a bit of

difference; since the Red Cross recognizes neither friend nor foe, but treats all alike.

It is possible to get accustomed to almost anything in this world. Not one of those boys would have imagined a short time before this that they could find courage and nerve enough to walk in the midst of such carnage; and yet they were actually doing it now.

As Rob and Merritt finished binding up the leg of a poor fellow who would soon have bled to death but for their coming, the nurse who had meanwhile come up behind them commended their work.

"It was excellently done, I want you to know," she told them, "and I can plainly see that I need have no further fears concerning your ability to be of much assistance here. Do all you can, my brave boys, but remember not to go too far. You are not accustomed to such sights, and it may affect you in the end."

She hurried away to take up her own labors, leaving the boys with a proud sense of having done their duty as genuine scouts should, trying to be of use to others in sore need.

For an hour, yes two of them, they continued to work there, while the stretcher bearers and the ambulances bore the victims of the late conflict back in apparently an unending procession. Those poor fellows who had no further need of attention were of course allowed to remain just as they had fallen; and by degrees the wounded were weeded out, to be taken care of back of the desperately defended lines, where the Red Cross floated from the canvas field hospital.

Tubby had about reached the end of his endurance. They could see that he was certainly getting very wabbly on his feet, for often he stumbled as he moved around with his bucket and dipper, seeking a stray wounded soldier who might have been overlooked, so as to supply water to quench his raging thirst.

The sun looked down from a cloudless September sky, and it was very hot for the advanced season of the year. Far off in the distance those never-ceasing German guns still kept up their muttering as they sent shells into some fortified place. The battle in this particular field was apparently not going to be renewed; for already

some of the Belgian batteries were being taken away, to face a new quarter where, according to their air scouts, the enemy meant to next try a forward movement.

Terrible though the experience may have been to all the boys, none of them had any regrets. The grateful looks and words they had received repaid them tenfold for all the nerve-racking ordeals through which they had gone.

"I think it's queer, though," Merritt was saying to Rob, as they walked around in search of any wretched victim whom they might assist, "that not a single German has been out on the battlefield to render first aid. I don't understand it at all. They've got as fine surgeons as any in the world, and the Red Cross works with their armies the same as with all the rest."

"I was bothering my head about that, too, since you mention it," Rob announced.

"What did you make up your mind was the cause of it?" continued Merritt, who had considerable respect for the opinions and decisions of the Eagle Patrol leader.

"It means either one of two things," he was

told. "It may be the settled policy of the Germans in their rush to push through Belgium and Northern France to leave their wounded to be taken care of by the enemy, whenever the battle has gone against them; or else a quick change of front compels them to abandon the field."

"Still," argued Merritt, who secretly was much in favor of the Allies, "you'd think there would be some parties out with stretchers, looking up their wounded. I never will understand it."

"Well, they must have a good reason for acting that way," Rob told him. "You know the Germans are great sticklers for sacrificing everything to the good of the cause of the Fatherland. If necessary even the wounded must be temporarily neglected until the end aimed at is attained. You remember what we heard in Antwerp about those three British cruisers that were just torpedoed in the North Sea by German submarines?"

"I can see what you mean, Rob. One was struck, and began to sink. The other two hurried up to render assistance, and while their engines were still they were hit by torpedoes and

went down. If, instead of trying to help their distressed comrades in the English way, they had let them look out for themselves, and first of all smashed the conning towers of the submarines, they would have saved themselves. I guess in war times the German style counts best, though it seems cruel to me."

"I think we had better pull out of this before long," remarked Rob.

"Well, if you asked me I'd say I've had enough to last the rest of my life," Merritt told his chum. "If ever I had any idea I'd like to be a soldier I give you my word that's gone glimmering now. What I've looked on this day has cured me."

"I was thinking more of poor Tubby than either of us," the patrol leader remarked. "You can see he's pretty near the end of his rope. Twice now I've seen him trip and fall flat, over some of the war material that's scattered around so thick. And he could hardly get on his feet again, he's that played out."

"But, Rob, Tubby has certainly shown up splendidly in this terrible trial!"

"He's done a heap more than we have," Rob

asserted, "because he always has been a timid sort of chap with regard to seeing blood when any of us got hurt. I remember how ghastly white Tubby grew that time one of the scouts in the Owl Patrol cut his foot with the ax. I thought for a while we'd have two patients on our hands. He had to sit down so as to get over it."

"Yes, and see what he's stood to-day," said Merritt. "Many a boy who boasts of having lots of nerve would have shrunk from doing what he has. Tubby's all right, and that's a fact. But it's high noon, and I warrant you he's feeling mighty hungry."

"He would, under ordinary conditions," said Rob, "but just now I don't believe any of us could eat a mouthful. I know the very thought of it makes me feel queer."

"That's because we're not used to such sights and sounds," Merritt explained. "I expect to wake up many a night with a groan and a shiver, dreaming I'm on a battlefield again, after those awful Maxims have been doing their murderous work."

"Well, we might take one last turn around," suggested Rob, "and if we fail to find any more wounded men, we'll call it a day's work, and quit."

"For one thing, I'm glad I don't mean to follow this up as a profession," his comrade continued. "I think I've had enough experience of fighting to last me a lifetime, and yet, on second thought, if it should happen again that they needed what little help I could give, why I'd have to pitch in."

CHAPTER XIX.

AN IMPORTANT CLUE.

"There was one thing I meant to mention to you, Merritt," said Rob, as they once more started to zigzag across the field where so many windrows of fallen Germans lay, just as they had dropped when making that daring charge.

It was perhaps a little strange how the boys could come to converse as they did while surrounded by such gruesome sights; but after several hours' familiarity with such scenes these begin to lose some of their harrowing features. And while Rob and his chum were still shocked by frequent sights, they did not feel the same weakness that had, in the beginning, almost overpowered them.

"Then, tell it now," urged Merritt.

"It was about Anthony," continued the other.

"Well, as we know only one Anthony just now," pursued Merritt, "I reckon you must be

referring to our late guide, the same who gave us the slip like a coward. What about Anthony, Rob?"

"I guessed right about him," replied the patrol leader. "It was not fear that tempted him to leave us in the lurch, but a craze to get in action. I think Anthony, while too old a man to be on the active list of the Belgian army, must have been a reservist."

"Yes, he told me so," said Tubby, coming up and catching what was being said by his chums.

"Well," Rob continued, "apparently he knew where to go to get a suit, for there he was as big as life, and he even had the audacity to wave his hand at me, and grin."

"Where was this, Rob?" demanded Merritt, surprised, as well he might be.

"Where but sitting on one of those ammunition caissons that went whirling past us into action. Anthony must have been with the artillery corps. He felt the longing come over him when he thought of the enemies of his country—those raiding Uhlans. So what did he do but take French leave on his horse, and get to

where this battery was waiting for orders to proceed to the front."

"Oh! well, if you're dead sure it was Anthony," Merritt observed, as if mollified by the information, "of course we'll have to forgive him. I was only mad because I thought the fellow'd gone and gotten cold feet, after taking our advance pay, too. If he's that kind of a patriot, I've got no quarrel with Anthony."

"And perhaps he even had a share in mowing down some of these Germans who had invaded his country," suggested Tubby. "Anthony seemed to be pretty bitter against the Kaiser and his people for trying to cross Belgium in order to strike France in the back, as he called it. Whee! I'm tired; but I didn't give up, did I, fellows? You never thought Tubby would be able to come through with what he has, and I know it."

"You deserve a medal, Tubby; and we were just saying what a change there's been in you," Rob told him, causing a wan smile to flit across the wearied face of the fat scout.

"Yes," added Merritt readily, "to see the ten-

der way you handled that German, hardly more than a boy himself, and who may never live to see his people again, anyone would have thought you had it in you to be a surgeon. Tubby, if I were you I'd pay more attention to such things. I honestly believe there's a streak of it in your blood."

"Well," Tubby remarked complacently, "we've had eminent doctors in our family; and my folks always said they hoped I'd take a fancy that way; but when I found how weak I was every time I saw a little blood, I gave up the idea. Now I've had my baptism on the battlefield, so mebbe I *will* change my mind. Even a soft-hearted fellow might make a good doctor, if he couldn't be a surgeon."

"Listen, there's someone calling to us!" exclaimed Merritt.

"And in German, too," added Rob. "Look all around, and see if you can find him. He must have recovered his senses after we passed by before."

"There's something moving under that pile of bodies," remarked Tubby with a shudder; "yes,

and now you can see a hand waving to us. Oh! let's hurry and get the poor fellow out!"

The others were just as willing, and soon they had dragged a man out from the weight that had almost smothered him.

"He's pretty badly hurt, I reckon," remarked Rob, as he immediately stooped down over the Bavarian soldier, "but not fatally, I think. We'll do what we can for him here, and the next time men come along with a stretcher, we'll send him over to the field hospital."

The wounded German soldier had listened to them speaking.

"Are you American boys, then?" he asked, in excellent English.

"Well, now, he must have guessed that when you said you 'reckoned,' Rob," declared Merritt, "but how comes it you talk English, my friend?"

"Oh! I'm from Hoboken," said the man, smiling in spite of the terrible pain he must have been enduring.

Rob was already busily engaged stanching the bleeding from his wounds, which seemed to

be numerous, though not apt to prove fatal, if they had proper attention.

"Do you mean Hoboken, New Jersey?" he asked, in surprise.

"Sure. I have lived there for many years now, and have a large brewing interest. Krauss is my name, Philip Krauss. I went across from Munich, in Bavaria, and was on a visit to my old home when the war came about. Although I have long been an American citizen I still love my native land, and they soon found a place for me in the ranks. But now if I ever get over this I think I will have had enough of fighting, and expect to return to my wife and children in Hoboken. But what are you doing here on this terrible field? It is not the place for boys."

"We are Boy Scouts," Tubby informed him proudly. "By accident we were where we could watch the battle being fought. Then along came the Red Cross ambulances, and the nurses. They asked us to assist, and as scouts all learn something about first aid, why we thought we'd help out. I guess you're about our last case, Herr Krauss."

Meanwhile Rob and Merritt busied themselves. The way they went about temporarily relieving his suffering, as well as stopping the loss of blood, quite won the admiration of the Hoboken patriot, even as it had done in the case of numerous other wounded men whom the boys attended previously.

It chanced that once again the boys became immersed in their own affairs, which were beginning to weigh heavily on their minds.

"I was making inquiries of one of the men with the stretchers," Rob told his comrades, "and he assured me that this little place by the name of Sempst is only a matter of six miles or so from where we are right now."

"Then," said Merritt, brightening up, "if only we stand a chance to get around without being gobbled by the Germans, we might strike in there to-morrow, and see if Steven Meredith is still at his post. The agent sent word to my grandfather that he had accepted a position there in charge of some manufacturing plant owned by a German firm in Brussels. I think myself there may have been some truth in that

story about his being in the pay of the German Government, both over in America and here!"

The wounded man was listening eagerly to what they said.

"Excuse me," he now broke in. "But that is not a common name; and I once met a Steven Meredith, who pretended to be an American citizen, but who I knew was an agent of the German Government. It may be the same man. I entertained him, together with the German consul in New York City, at my home in Hoboken. Do you happen to know any peculiarity about his looks or manner that would identify him?"

"The man we are trying to find was tall," said Merritt quickly, "and has a slight cast in his left eye. He talks with something of a twang, as though he might be a Down-East Yankee."

"It must be the same!" declared Philip Krauss, as though convinced. "That accent, I believe, was cleverly assumed for a purpose. Promise me that you will not think it your duty to betray him to the enemy, and I will tell you still more of him."

Merritt and Rob exchanged significant looks.

"We have no fight against either Germany or the Allies," Merritt observed, "for Americans are neutral, and there would be no need of our betraying him, even if we had the chance. So we can easily give you that promise. He has something in his possession that belongs to my family; and we have come a long way to get it; that is all we want of Steven Meredith. Now, what can you tell us about him?"

"Only this," replied the wounded Hoboken brewer. "You have perhaps saved my life, and I feel I am under heavy obligations for the favor. It is worth something to my wife and family that I should live to see Hoboken again. The man you are looking for is in the suburbs of Brussels. You spoke of Sempst. He was there two days ago when my troop passed through. That may ease your minds, my brave boys."

"Would you mind telling us how you know this?" asked Rob.

"I saw him, and talked with him," came the convincing response. "He remembered me, though he put his finger on his lips, and looked around him as though he were suspicious. He

is, as you said, in charge of a manufacturing plant, or appears to be, though he may have been sent there to spy upon the people, and learn valuable facts for the service. But I am glad to be able to do even a little in return for your kindness."

As two soldiers wearing the Red Cross on their sleeves came along just then with a stretcher, the boys beckoned to them, and had Philip Krauss carried off to the field hospital. They did not see him again after that. If, however, they should ever reach home again, they determined some day to look the Hoboken man up, and learn of his further adventures.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CAMP FIRES OF AN ARMY.

"Here, it's getting well along into the afternoon," remarked Tubby with a forlorn look on his face, "and I'm so knocked out that if you told me you meant to make a start for the little Belgian town right away I'd faint, sure I would."

"Don't think of doing it, then, Tubby," Rob told him, "because the rest of your chums are feeling in pretty much the same box themselves."

"We've had a terribly hard day of it, for a fact," agreed Merritt, as he looked around upon the scene, and shuddered in spite of his well known nerve.

"Then please tell me what's the program?" pleaded the fat scout. "That munch of black bread was good enough to keep a fellow from starving to death; but I certainly do hope there's a better prospect ahead of us for supper."

"Rob, you've got a scheme!" asserted Merritt.

"What makes you think so?" asked the other, smiling languidly; for he was very nearly exhausted from the hard work he had done acting as an assistant field surgeon in the service of the Red Cross corps, doing temporary work in binding up wounds, and giving stimulants to those who were weak through loss of blood.

"Oh! I can tell it from the way you act," replied Merritt. "I haven't been your closest chum all this time without getting to know what different things mean. Now give us a pointer; what about getting some supper, and finding a place to sleep to-night?"

"Well, do you think you could stand for another night in the hay?" demanded Rob.

"Just try me, that's all!" whimpered Tubby. "And, say, if you're thinking of going back to that village again, I only hope they'll be good to us, and feed us like they did this morning."

"That's what I had in mind," the patrol leader told them. "So the sooner we make a start that way the sooner we can rest up."

It was weary work tramping all the way back to the little village where they had first met

the ambulances of the Red Cross corps, and joined hands with the workers. Rob would have liked to say good-by to the American nurse who had taken so much interest in their welfare. He knew, though, that it would be too much for Tubby to approach that terrible field hospital, where undoubtedly the nurses were still busily engaged helping the surgeons in their labors.

Whenever Tubby groaned and gave signs of dropping, they called a temporary halt and, in this way, made it as easy for the fat scout as possible.

Somehow the very thought of that sweet-scented hay appealed to Tubby very nearly as much as a good feed might; and that was saying a great deal.

"I don't wonder at hoboes liking haystacks when they're wandering around the country, if only they're as nice as that mow we struck," he told the others more than once. "Why, things couldn't be better. Now I understand what they mean when they say 'hitting the hay.' It means a sweet sleep. But we're really getting there, ain't we, Rob?"

"We're right on top of the village now, Tubby," Merritt told him.

"Yes," added Rob, "there you can see the elevation we stood on when we watched the terrible battle. The village is here on our left. One more tug, and we'll arrive, so brace up, Tubby."

"Oh! I'm getting along quite decent, thank you, Rob. But I'll be glad when we're sitting on that bench under the shade of the tree."

As they entered the village they found that it was quite a different place from the time of their previous visit. Streams of wounded men had been brought in, and every other cottage was turned into a temporary hospital.

Of course the injured Belgians were given the first choice, as was perfectly natural; but Rob was pleased to see that after all these humble villagers had human traits in their make-up. Misery makes the whole world akin, and although they had no reason to love any German invader, the sight of stalwart young Teutons suffering agonies touched many a mother's heart; their own sons might any day be in need of the

same attention from strangers, and they could not refuse to aid these wounded foes.

So into many a Belgian home a sorely stricken German was carried, to be cared for until the time came when he could be removed, either to his own lines, or to Antwerp.

The boys first of all sought that shady spot where the bench mentioned by Tubby offered an inviting seat. Here they sat down, and observed the many stirring sights that were taking place all around them.

"I've seen two men taken to the barn," remarked Merritt, half an hour later, "and so I reckon we'll have neighbors in our hay-mow tonight."

Tubby made a grimace, and then seemed to be ashamed of his selfishness.

"Well, if we do have to play nurse," he observed with the air of a philosopher, "I suppose we can stand it. What are all our troubles, I'd like to know, compared to those these poor people are suffering?"

"That's right, Tubby," said Merritt, "and

we'll manage to pick up plenty of sleep, I should think."

"It'll have to be in the early part of the night, then," Rob told them, "because we want to get out of this a couple of hours before daylight."

"You mean to start then for Sempst, do you?" asked Tubby, with a sigh.

"Yes, because it might turn out to be dangerous work walking in broad daylight, until we've managed to get around the Germans," Rob explained. "I've already picked up considerable information about the country, and the lay of the land. Between now and the time we turn in I hope to learn still more, so that I can take you on a road by starlight that will make a circuit around the German camps."

Apparently both his mates had the utmost confidence in Rob's ability to do this, for there was no word of protest raised. Merritt asked a few questions, and then they fell back upon their old occupation of watching the movements of the villagers, mostly women, as they bustled to and fro.

Pretty soon Rob sauntered over to the inn, and

had a long talk with the old man who ran the public house. They could see him doing considerable pointing, and from this fact judged that Rob was keeping his word about picking up all the information possible.

When he came back it was getting near sundown; and of course the first thing Tubby asked was:

"Did he say we could have it, Rob?"

As both of the other scouts were so well acquainted with Tubby's weak points they did not need a dictionary in order to understand what was on his mind.

"I'm glad to tell you, Tubby," replied the other, "that the innkeeper says we deserve the best supper he can get ready. It seems that they've been talking about us here. Some of the nurses must have told how we worked on the battlefield; or it may be the wounded soldiers mentioned the fact that we did something to help them bear up till the stretchers arrived. No matter what happened, the innkeeper thinks a heap of us all, and we'll not go to our hay shake-downs hungry this night!"

"Hurray!" cried Tubby joyfully, "he's certainly a good fellow, Rob, I tell you; and I'm never going to forget him. The man who keeps my body and soul together has my eternal gratitude."

Later on they were called in, and found that a substantial meal had been prepared for them. Tubby was fairly ravenous, and his chums found it necessary to warn him not to founder.

"Remember, we've got to be up and doing by three in the morning at the latest," Rob observed, "and if you make yourself sick the whole plan will be knocked galley-west. We might have to leave you behind, after all."

That last threat brought Tubby to his senses.

"Why, you see," he explained, as he pushed himself away from the table and its temptations, "I was trying to fix it so that in case we had to go without our breakfast to-morrow I'd be in shape to stand it."

"Sometimes," mused Merritt, "I think you're trying to fix it so that you could do without eating for a week."

When they made their way outside again it

was to find that night had fallen. In the western sky a young moon looked down pityingly on the field which had so lately been marked by the desperate charge of the German hosts, only to fail in their effort to break through the Belgian intrenchments with their barbed wire defenses.

"Look, over there are hundreds of little fires flickering!" exclaimed Tubby.

"Those are the camp fires of the Germans," Rob told him. "I want to fix them in my mind, because we will have to make a wide detour, so as to avoid running across any patrol on the outskirts of their camp. I hope by the time daylight comes we can be far enough around to get off without being seen. The worst thing is this khaki uniform business. If only we had on ordinary clothes we might be taken for Belgian boys. But, as it is, they'll think we're soldiers, or at the least Belgian scouts, and they treat them as if they were regular enlisted men."

Shortly afterward they again sought the barn. The lantern once more hung on its accustomed hook, and by its friendly gleam Rob and his two chums were enabled to find the place where on

the preceding night they had slept so well. The wounded men happened to be removed from them by some little distance. They could be heard occasionally groaning, or talking in low tones; but, as the boys were too tired to remain awake long, they soon lost all consciousness of what was passing around them.

Perhaps the crowing of a rooster nearby may have told Rob that it was in the neighborhod of three o'clock, for he aroused his chums close to that time.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HANGING BRIDGE.

"Do we have to get out at this terribly early hour?" asked Tubby, as he dug his knuckles into his eyes, still heavy with sleep.

"Yes," said Rob. "I've taken a look at the stars, and it must be half-past two, or near it. You know I've made it a practice to be able to tell the hour of night in that way, and can hit it every time. Come, get a move on you, Tubby, unless you'd prefer staying here in the hay and waiting till we come back."

"Well, you don't shake me that way if I know it," muttered Tubby, hastening to crawl out of his snug nest.

The night air was rather chilly, when once they found themselves outside. All of them were glad to button up their coats.

Looking in the direction where the myriad of fires had been burning earlier in the night and

seeming like innumerable giant fireflies which they were accustomed to seeing summer evenings at home, they found that most of them had died out.

"I expected that would happen," said Rob, when Merritt called his attention to the altered conditions in the camp of the Germans, "and it's lucky I made my plans without depending on seeing those fires again. I've got other landmarks to go by."

"I expected you'd have," said Merritt, filled with the utmost confidence in the leader of the Eagle Patrol, which faith was founded on a long list of past performances worth remembering.

As there was nothing to hinder them, they made an immediate start. Tubby was observed to cast a last longing look back toward the humble village inn. No doubt he was deploring the necessity that compelled them to leave such hospitable quarters without waiting for breakfast-time to come along.

It was not exactly dark, once their eyes became accustomed to conditions. The stars shone

brilliantly in the clear heavens overhead, and in open country it is possible to steer one's way fairly well by starlight.

For some time the boys went on. Tubby, of course, often stumbled, for it would not have been Tubby otherwise; but, as he had not so far actually spread himself face downward on the road, he thought he was doing very well.

Merritt could see how Rob had laid out their course, by the assistance of the friendly innkeeper, who had been told of their desire to reach the little place called Sempst. He had really drawn Rob a rude but correct chart of the roads covering the territory between, and informed him as to what his best plan of campaign would be.

A number of times they had slight scares. Once a dog ran out from a yard and commenced barking wildly at them, even threatening to nip Tubby in the leg. It was only natural for the threatened one to shout angrily and kick desperately at the offending canine. By great good luck he managed to land the toe of his shoe

against the vicious animal's nose, as a loud howl announced.

"There, that serves you right, for bothering me, you silly thing!" grumbled Tubby.

The others knew he must be very proud of that shot, and would often refer to it when complaints were made afterward to the effect that he was "slow." Any one who could manage to get his foot in contact with a snapping dog must not be reckoned out of the running.

Just what they would do should they finally reach the small town where Steven Meredith was supposed to be in charge of a large German manufacturing plant, they had not as yet determined. It was Rob's plan to secure possession of that field-glass case by hook or crook, for, if it proved impossible to obtain by fair means, then he meant to try strategy.

For this purpose he had even bought an empty case while in Antwerp which had been carried through all their adventures. It was a new one, for, in making up his plans, Rob may have had in mind the old Arabian story of the magical lamp, and how the cunning schemer managed to

get possession of it by going around and offering housewives to exchange new lamps for old ones.

He meant to exchange with Steven, and give him a brand new case for his worn one, should the opportunity arise for such a transfer.

"And once we get our hands on that bit of paper," he had told the others, "we'll shake the dust of this country off our shoes in the biggest hurry ever."

It must have been fully an hour after they left the stable of the village inn when Rob imparted some information to his chums that caused Tubby, at least, more or less apprehension.

"It's about time we were coming to it now," Rob started to say.

"What, already?" remarked Tubby, evidently delighted, for, of course, he foolishly thought it must be the little town they were heading for that Rob meant.

The other quickly undeceived him.

"Oh! we're a long, long way off from Sempst yet, Tubby," he said. "I was referring to a bridge the inn-keeper told me about, that's all."

"What's there about a bridge to worry us, I'd

like to know?" muttered the fat scout suspiciously, feeling terribly depressed, because he had been so like a drowning man grasping at a straw.

"Unless it happens to be guarded by the Germans," suggested Merritt softly, "and then we'd have a dickens of a time getting across."

"The trouble about this particular bridge isn't so much that it's apt to be guarded," Rob went on to inform them, "but the inn-keeper was afraid we'd find it gone!"

"Blown up, do you mean, Rob?" Tubby demanded.

"It's been reported that way," he was informed. "Fact is, there doesn't seem to be much doubt about it. From all accounts, the Belgians destroyed it, as they have done many other costly bridges, so as to impede the advance of the German heavy guns. It takes lots of time and trouble to rebuild a bridge and make it strong enough to let a monster siege gun rumble over."

"But, Rob, shall we have to swim across, or is there a sort of ford handy that we might use?" Merritt inquired.

"I certainly hope we don't have to swim, any-

way," Tubby declared, "for, if there's one thing I hate to do, it's to get soaking wet. It's so uncomfortable afterward, and especially when you can't change your clothes. But, of course, if it's got to be done, we'll all have to just grin and bear it."

"It may not be necessary in this case," added Rob, no doubt purposely delaying his information, because he liked to hear Tubby drumming up his courage in this way.

"Then mebbe you've gone and got some wings hidden away, which we can use to fly across?" suggested Tubby quickly, "or it might be an aëroplane is kept handy so's to ferry folks over dryshod."

"Neither of your guesses hits the mark, Tubby," he was informed. "The inn-keeper said one man told him that, while the bridge was wrecked, a few of the steel beams still hung in place, so that any one who was fairly spry might manage to make his way over from one side to the other. A number had done it, including the man who told him."

"If others can, we ought to be able to make it," Merritt said stoutly.

"Yes, I suppose that's so," admitted Tubby ruefully, "but then you mustn't forget that they had daylight to help out. That makes a heap of difference. I never did have the eyes of a cat so's to see in the dark."

"It's getting on toward the first peep of dawn," Rob told him; "and I expect there'll be some light for us when we reach the bridge."

"We can wait till she comes along, then," Tubby continued, as though even that assurance gave him more or less satisfaction.

From the formation of the country Rob judged they must soon arrive at the place of the bridge. He had already made the discovery that there was a stream on one side of them, which the road would have to cross before long.

"I think I see where it lies," Merritt announced a few minutes after they had stopped talking.

"Yes," admitted the leader, when he had followed the course of Merritt's outstretched finger as well as was possible in the semi-darkness, "that

must be the anchorage of the bridge. We'll soon know what we're going to be up against."

"Well, all I hope is we don't have to swim, that's what!" Tubby muttered.

Rob, as they continued to advance, kept a careful lookout. He wondered whether any sort of patrol could have been stationed at the ruined bridge by one or the other of the hostile armies. It might make considerable difference with them in their intended crossing; and would turn out very awkward if, when they were in the middle of the span, they discovered they were being made targets by some reckless marksmen on the further shore.

Presently they drew up alongside the spot. As Rob had hinted the night was really at an end, and in the east the first peep of coming dawn could be seen in the brightening sky.

"It's a wreck, all right!" said Merritt, as they stood there, straining their eyes to try and follow the outlines of the torn steel girders that seemed to have been twisted into all manner of queer shapes by the force of the explosion.

"Gingersnaps and popguns!" ejaculated Tub-

by helplessly, "and do you really expect to crawl over that swinging thing? I've read about some awful hanging bridges in the mountains of South America and Africa, but I bet you they couldn't hold a candle alongside this mussed-up affair. Whee! you'd have to blindfold me, I'm afraid, boys, if you expected me to creep out there on that dizzy girder."

"We'll wait a bit till the light gets stronger," Rob counseled, knowing full well that when it came to it Tubby would summon the necessary resolution to cross over, especially if his comrades showed the way.

A quarter of an hour elapsed. By that time they could see across fairly well.

"First of all," Rob summed up, "there doesn't seem to be anybody over there to bother us, that I can notice."

"And the way across isn't so bad, that I can see," announced Merritt, principally to help buoy up the sinking heart of poor Tubby. "Why, all of us have done stunts worse than that. You know we have, Tubby, many a time."

"Well," Tubby answered him weakly, "just as

you say, boys. I'm in your hands. I promise to do the best I can to get over; but, if I *should* slip, please get me out of the river as soon as you can. You know I'm not a cracking good hand at swimming."

Of course they promised, and cheered him up by every means possible; but it was with many doubts that in the end Tubby consented to start forth on the trip.

Rob led the way, and after him came the fat chum, with Merritt bringing up the rear. There was a method in this arrangement, for, while the pilot could test each girder, so as to pronounce it secure, the rear guard was able to keep an eye on luckless Tubby, and even give him an occasional word of advice.

Now that the morning had arrived they could see better with each passing minute; and Rob soon declared there was no necessity for any further delay.

It was always a principle with him to grapple with a difficulty, and carry out his plans, without letting anything like dismay seize hold of his heart.

Accordingly Rob now made a start.

"Why, this is dead easy," was the way he sung out, after he had passed along the swaying girder for a little distance. "All you have to make sure of is that your grip is sound. Then keep hunching along, foot by foot. And don't look down any more than you can help, because it might make you dizzy."

Tubby shut his teeth hard, and began to follow after the pilot. He made good progress until he had about reached the middle of the rocking span. Then Rob was really alarmed to hear a sudden loud cry, and feel his slender hold shaken violently.

Something had certainly happened to unfortunate Tubby!

CHAPTER XXII.

SCOUT TACTICS.

Just as he feared, when Rob managed to turn around and look back, he found that Tubby had gone and done it again. Whether he had missed his footing, or something had given way under his additional weight, was a question that could not be decided.

Before Merritt, close in his rear, could thrust out a helping hand, poor Tubby had fallen. The river was all of thirty feet below, and just there the water looked unusually unpleasant, because it had considerable foam on the surface, there being a shallow rift above the wider stretch.

By the merest accident in the world, Tubby's clutching hands had succeeded in fastening upon a loose steel stay that hung downward for ten feet. It must have given the fat boy a considerable wrench when he gripped this, but he had clung with the tenacity of despair.

When Rob turned around, the first thing he saw was Merritt kneeling there on the violently agitated girder over which they were making their crossing. He was staring downward, and, of course, Rob instantly focused his gaze in the same quarter.

He had expected to see Tubby splashing about like a porpoise in the stream far down below; but, instead, was astonished to discover him clinging desperately to that loose piece of steel wreckage.

Tubby had his face turned up toward his chums. There was not a particle of the rosy color to be seen that as a rule dyed his ample face; in fact, he was as white as a ghost. A beseeching look was in his eyes. Tubby knew that swinging there he was in a serious predicament, from which there would be only one escape if he were left to his own devices. That would mean he must release his frantic clutch on the swaying steel rope, and drop down into the river, a possibility he shuddered to contemplate.

"Hey! get me up out of this, fellows, can't you?" he whined, for, after his recent gymnastic

efforts, he no longer had sufficient breath to shout.

"Clasp your legs around the thing, can't you, Tubby?" said Rob, who saw that the strain on the other's arms must be tremendous, judging from the way he was hanging there.

The advice struck Tubby as well worth following; so he immediately began to work his short legs violently until he found that he could, as Rob suggested, twist them around his slender support.

When that had been accomplished it was much easier for him. He began to suck in some encouragement once more.

"But won't you try and get me up again, Rob?" he asked piteously. "I can't hang on here for very long, like a regular old pendulum to a clock. I'm not wound up for a seven-day-goer. And say, I'd hate to have to drop kerplunk into all that water down there. Think up some way to grab me out of this, won't you, Rob?"

"I'm trying to, Tubby. Keep still a bit, and let me think," he was told.

In one way, of course, it was a ridiculous sight,

and that was why Rob winked his eye at Merritt when he thought he could detect a whimsical look on the other's face. Still, it was anything but a laughing matter to poor Tubby, who felt that he had a tremendous amount at stake. Every time he found himself compelled to let his horrified eyes turn downward that noisy stream seemed to be more and more formidable to him. He fairly hated it.

"Can't you climb up again, Tubby?" asked Merritt, who knew exactly what he would have quickly done had he found himself placed in the same predicament.

"I'd like to, the worst kind," the fat scout assured him, "but you know I'm feeling very queer and weak, so I don't believe I could do much that way, unless," he added quickly, "I had some assistance from above."

"And that's just what I'm going to try and give you, Tubby."

While Rob was saying this he had unbuttoned his coat. This he proceeded to take off, first making sure to transfer anything he had in the pockets, so that he might not suffer a loss.

"Now, by leaning down here, I think I can reach you with this coat," he proceeded to explain. "If I had a rope, it would be much easier, for with a loop I could make a sure thing of it. But half a loaf is better than no bread, they say."

"Of course it is, Rob," agreed Tubby, who was in no position to quarrel with any measures that were taken for his relief. "But what can I do with the coat when it comes down to me? I don't feel that cold, you know."

"I'm going to keep hold of one end, Tubby," Rob explained quietly, in a way to convince the imperiled scout that everything was working as arranged, and that he need not worry. "With just one hand you get a good grip of the end that's near you; then start in to try and climb, using your clasped legs the best you know how. And don't get discouraged if you only come up an inch or so at a time. When you're within reach Merritt will hang down and lend a hand, too."

All of which was undoubtedly very cheering to Tubby. This thing of having stanch comrades

He immediately took a firm grip—and commenced to wriggle the best he knew how.—*Page* 247.

in times of distress was, he had always believed, one of the best parts of the scout brotherhood.

He immediately took a firm grip of the dangling coat-sleeve, and commenced to wriggle the best he knew how.

"I'm making it, Rob; sure I am!" he presently announced. "That time I slid up as much as six inches. It was a bully hunch, that coat racket of yours. Keep her going, Rob, and I'll get there yet. Never give up—that's my motto, you know. I may get in lots of scrapes, but somehow I always do manage to crawl out, don't I?"

"Save your breath, Tubby, for your work; don't chatter so much," Rob told him.

Merritt was ready to do his part. He had clasped a leg about the girder to help hold him, and was leaning as far down as possible. Presently the grunting fat chum reached a place where he could be taken hold of, and so Merritt fastened a hand in his coat back of his neck.

"Here you come, Tubby," he said encouragingly.

"Don't let go with your hands or knees yet!" warned Rob; for, should Tubby be so foolish as

to do this, the chances were that such a sudden weight might drag Merritt down, and both would take the plunge.

It required considerable effort to finally land Tubby on the horizontal girder, but in the end this was accomplished. Then all of them sat there to rest after their recent violent exertions.

"I don't see how I came to do it," Tubby finally remarked, as though he deemed it necessary that some sort of explanation were forthcoming. "I was moving along as nice as you please, when all of a sudden I felt myself going. I must have grabbed at the air, and happened to get a grip on that hanging steel rope. Well, it might have been a whole lot worse for me! I'm glad I didn't get soused in the river. And I'll never forget how nobly my chums came to the rescue."

"Oh! stow that sort of talk, Tubby," Merritt told him. "That's what we're here for. What's a scout wearing his khaki uniform for if it isn't to remind him what he owes to his chums? You'd do the same for us any old time."

"Just try me, that's all," declared the grateful Tubby; and then, changing his tune, he went on

to say: "Here we are, out in the middle of the span, and it's just as hard to go back as it is to move forward. So when you're ready, Rob, start off again. I'll try not to slip any more. The next time you might see my finish."

"I'm sure it would see mine," remarked Merritt, rubbing the arm he had used in order to tug at Tubby's great weight.

Luckily nothing more happened, and they were able to reach the opposite shore in safety. Tubby sank down and panted, as soon as he crawled off the end of that fragment of the steel bridge.

"Thank goodness that job is over with!" he exclaimed fervently, "and all I hope is that we don't have to come back this way."

"Oh! you're getting to be an expert tight-rope walker by now, Tubby," Merritt said encouragingly. "A little more practice, and you could apply for a job with Barnum & Bailey's circus."

"Thank you, Merritt, but I have loftier aims than that calling," said Tubby disdainfully.

"Well, let's be getting on," suggested Rob. "We've spent enough time here already."

"Thank goodness I don't have to tramp along

soaked to the skin," Tubby was heard to tell himself, with gratitude.

The road skirted the river bank on the side they were now on for some little distance at least. Rob continued to keep a watchful eye around as they progressed. He knew there was always a chance that they might meet some detachment of troops hurrying along; though the fact of the bridge being down must be known to the Germans, and would deter them from trying to make use of this road until a temporary structure could be thrown across the river by their engineers.

Most of the inhabitants had fled from that part of the country. Some may have drifted into Brussels before the capital fell into the hands of the invaders, when August was two-thirds gone; and they had remained there ever since. Others had fled in the direction of Ghent and Antwerp, in the hope that these cities might hold out against the German army.

Several times they saw old men at work in the fields, trying to save a part of their farm crops, though without horses they could do little. Every beast of burden had been drafted for one or the

other army; what the Belgians missed the Germans had certainly commandeered to take the place of horses lost in the numerous fierce engagements thus far fought.

On consulting his little chart Rob soon found that it would be necessary for them to abandon this good road, and take to a smaller one that branched off from it, winding in through the trees, and past farms that had been thrifty before this blight fell on the land.

"Here's a wood ahead of us that looks as if it covered considerable territory, and you don't often see such a bunch of timber in Belgium," Merritt announced presently.

"Because, with seven million inhabitants to such a small area," added Rob, "it's always been necessary that they employ what is called intensive farming. That is, they get as much out of the soil as possible, even to several crops off of the same patch of ground during the year."

"Belgium is a busy manufacturing country, too, or has been up to now," Merritt continued, which information he may have remembered from his training at school, or else found in some

guide-book purchased in New York City before their steamer sailed for England.

"I wonder what we'll strike on the other side of this wood?" Tubby questioned, always speculating on things to come; and possibly hoping then and there they might run across a hospitable farmer who would kindly offer to provide them with some sort of breakfast.

"That's yet to be seen," Merritt told him. "Here's where there seems to be a sort of swampy patch, with water and bogs. Listen to the frogs croaking, will you? And I can see more than a few whoppers, too. Chances are this is a frog farm that supplies the big hotels in Brussels and Antwerp. You know the French are keen on frogs' legs, and pay fancy prices for them by the pound."

"I've eaten them more than once," Rob informed them, "and I never had spring chicken that was more toothsome and tender."

Whereupon Tubby cast a wistful eye toward the border of the frogpond, where the big greenbacks could be seen, sitting partly in the water, and calling to one another socially.

The boys kept walking on, and finally came to where the trees began to get more scanty. About this time Rob made a discovery that was not at all pleasing.

"Hold up, fellows," he said in a hoarse whisper that thrilled Tubby in particular, "our road is blocked. There's a whole German army corps camped ahead of us; and it's either go back, or else hide here in the woods till they take a notion to break camp and clear out. Let's drop down in the brush and talk it over."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FROG HUNTERS.

"That settles me, I guess!" said Tubby sadly, as he followed Rob into the shelter of the brush nearby, from which haven of refuge they might watch to see what chances there were of the big camp, a mile and more away, being broken up.

"I know what you're thinking about, Tubby," Merritt told him; "that none of us has had any breakfast, and the outlook for dinner is about as tough as it could be."

"Yes," admitted the fat scout, "I feel just like kicking myself, because I didn't think of doing it when I had the chance."

"Doing what?" asked Merritt.

"Getting that good-natured old fellow at the inn to put us up some lunch," was the explanation Tubby offered. "I guess he'd have done it, too, because he thought we deserved being taken care of, after hearing what the wounded Belgian

soldiers had to tell about us. Oh! it's a shame how all my great thoughts come afterward. What's the use of locking the stable door when the horse has been stolen?"

"Well, cheer up," said Rob, who, of course, had overheard what was being said; "it may not be a case of starving."

"See here, you don't happen to have a lot of stuff hidden away on your person, do you, Rob?" gasped Tubby hopefully; and, as the other shook his head, he continued in a mournful tone, "I thought that would be too good to be true. But please tell us what you mean by saying it mightn't be so very serious. Mebbe you know of a hen-roost nearby, where we might find a tough old Dominick fowl that had been overlooked by the raider squads from the camp?"

"If I did I'd tell you, Tubby; but wait a bit, while we watch the camp. If nothing happens inside of two hours, I've got a sort of scheme to propose to you both, and I hope it'll meet with your approbation."

"Two hours! Two long, weary hours! Gee!" And, as Tubby said this, he proceeded to take

in some of the slack of his waistband, possibly meaning to show Rob how terribly he had fallen away of late.

They could see that myriads of men were moving about on the level stretch of country where the invaders were encamped. Fires were going, and doubtless those excellent camp ovens, of which so much had been written, were being used to bake fresh bread for the day. Those Germans omitted nothing that would provide for the comfort of the enlisted men.

"It looks as though they meant to stay there all day," remarked Rob, when they had been observing these things for at least a full hour.

"Oh! Rob!" protested Tubby helplessly, as though the information gave him a severe pain.

"Well, they believe in drilling right up to the minute they go into battle," was what Merritt remarked; "for there you can see a whole regiment of them marching in review past the commander, with others following behind."

"It's a wonderful sight," admitted Rob. "I never saw soldiers keep step, and seem to be such parts of a machine like that. You'd think they

were moved by some network of wires, like a big automatic engine."

"Oh! look what funny steps that first line is practicing!" cried Tubby. "Why, they must be only boys, and just playing soldiers. See how they lift their feet, and go along like a high-stepper of a horse. Ain't that the limit, now?"

"I tell you what that must be," said Rob, quickly. "I've read about what they call the 'goose-step.' It's a flinging up of each leg, as the step is taken, bending the knee, instead of keeping it stiff, like most soldiers on parade do."

"The silly nonsense!" laughed Tubby. "What would I look like trying that fancy step? I thought the Kaiser had more sense than that."

"Hold on. Don't condemn a thing before you know what it's meant for," said Rob. "There's an object, and a mighty good one, about that step, even if it does make most people smile when they see it for the first time."

"Then let's hear what it is, please, Rob."

"As far as I know about it, the object is to strengthen the muscles of the leg, and give those that are tired from a set position a rest. Don't

you see how that sort of a movement relieves the leg? Try it a few times, and you'll believe me."

"Have you ever seen the goose-step before, Rob?" asked Merritt.

"Only once, in a moving-picture play of the German maneuvers," he was told. "It struck me then as ridiculous; but I knew those German military men had long heads, and would not start a thing like that in a parade without something big back of it. So, when I got home I tried it a few times, and then I saw what a splendid relief that throwing forward of the foot was. There goes another line doing it."

They continued to crouch—there was small possibility of any one discovering them—and watched all that was going on in the busy camp beyond.

Not once did any of the soldiers wander away. It was plainly evident that they were being given no liberties. Rob only hoped that the order would come for this corps to get on the move, and head to the southwest; for he did not doubt but they were meaning to go to Ghent, or to some other place toward the coast.

Several times Tubby was observed to crane his neck and look up toward the heavens anxiously. The others did not need to be told what those signs indicated. They knew very well that the fat chum had not become suddenly interested in astronomy, or expected an eclipse of the sun to happen. He was merely noting how far along his morning journey the sky king had traveled, because he could not forget how Rob had set a time limit on their remaining there.

Two hours he had mentioned as the sum total of their stay; when that boundary had been reached Rob was going to make some sort of pleasing proposition. Tubby hoped it would have to do with the procuring of a certain nourishment, of which all of them certainly stood in great need.

At last Rob gave signs of making a move.

"Now, if you fellows will come back along the road a little ways with me," he announced with a smile, "I've got something to propose. I only hope you fall in with my views, for then there's a chance that we'll have something to eat."

"Oh! you can count on me agreeing with you,

Rob!" said Tubby cheerfully. "No matter whether it's fur, fin, or feather, I think I could do justice to nearly anything that grows."

"As it happens, it's something that doesn't fly or walk that I have in my mind," Rob declared rather mysteriously. "The fact is, it hops!"

"Now you have got me worse balled up than ever," protested Tubby, his brow wrinkled with his endeavor to guess the answer.

"I think I know," volunteered Merritt, grinning amicably.

"What does he mean, then? Please hurry and tell me," pleaded Tubby.

"Frogs, isn't it, Rob?" demanded the other.

"Oh! gingersnaps and popguns! Do I have to come down to choosing between eating jumpers and starving to death?" complained the fat boy, looking distressed.

"Well, wait till you get your first taste, that's all," Rob told him. "If you don't say it beats anything you ever took between your teeth, I'm mistaken, and that's all there is about it. Why, they're reckoned one of the fanciest dishes in all the high-class clubs in America, along with dia-

mond-back terrapin, canvas-back duck, and such things. The only thing I'm afraid about is that after you get your first taste you'll want to hog the whole supply."

"But how shall we catch the frogs, and then cook them?" asked Merritt.

"The first ought to be easy," replied Rob, "seeing how plentiful they are, and how big and tame. I see a dandy piece of wood that would make a good bow with a piece of stout cord I've got in my pocket. Merritt, get some of those straight little canes, growing on the edge of the water. We can make them do for arrows, and, even without feathers, I think I can hit a big frog with one at ten paces away. It'll be fun as well as a profitable business. Frog-hunters, get busy now."

"Here's a long pole, Rob. Shall I take it and steal up close enough to whack a few of the jumpers on the head?" asked Tubby, now entering into the spirit of the game.

Being given permission, and warned not to make too big a noise, lest he frighten all the frogs into jumping, he set about his task. After

several failures he finally brought one monstrous greenback frog to where the others were still working.

"I'll show you how to cut off the saddle, and skin the hind legs," said Rob.

Tubby did not altogether like this job. The slimy feeling of the frog rather went against his stomach. Still, after the large hind legs had been duly skinned, they presented so much the appearance of the white meat of a spring chicken that Tubby felt encouraged enough to set forth again.

He had four victims by the time Rob and Merritt pronounced the bow and arrow part of the business in readiness for work.

They kept at it steadily for an hour and more. Rob found considerable excitement and profit in his archery. His arrows could not be wholly depended on, for they were not properly balanced; but the distance was so short that he made numerous fatal shots.

Merritt, too, had secured another long pole, and joined Tubby in his share of the frog hunt. It was exciting enough, and with more or less

delicious little thrills connected with it. No doubt the frogs must have enjoyed it immensely; but then, no one bothered asking what they thought of such tactics. A boy's hunger *must* be allayed, and, if there were only frogs handy, why so much the worse for the "hoppers."

"Whew! Don't you think we've got enough, Rob?" asked Tubby, unable to stand it any longer.

"What's the score?" asked the archer, as he tossed still another great big victim toward the spot where the fat scout had been counting the pile.

"Twenty-one, all told," replied Tubby. "That would mean seven for each. But how in the world can we cook them? I hope now you don't mean to tackle them raw? I love raw oysters, but I'd draw the line at frogs. I'm no cannibal."

"Well, let's find a place deeper in the woods, where we can make a fire out of selected dry wood that will make so little smoke it can't be noticed. That's an old Indian trick, you know. Hunters used to practice it away back in the time of Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton. When they

were in a hostile country they had to be mighty careful about making a smoke. I've tried it before, and believe I can pick out the right kind of fuel to use."

While the others were finishing the not very pleasant work of skinning the numerous frog saddles, Rob busied himself with making the fire in a secluded neck of the woods. In the midst of jutting stones he soon had a blaze going. It could not be seen twenty feet away, on account of the obstructions; and, as the proper kind of wood had been selected, there was no smoke to mention.

The boys would have given something for their well-remembered frying pan, just at that time, and some pieces of salt pork with which to sweeten the dainty morsels which were to constitute their luncheon. They were true scouts, however, and could make the best of a bad bargain.

"All hunters do not have skillets when they're in the woods," said Rob, as he took a long splinter he had prepared, thrust it into one of the saddles, and then, poking the other end into the ground close to the fire, allowed the meat to get

the benefit of the heat. "We must do what we can in this old-fashioned way. The best sauce, after all, is hunger; and, from the look on Tubby's face, I reckon he's fairly wild to set his teeth in the first of the feast."

Pretty soon it was a lively scene, with all those forks having to be attended to. A tempting odor also began to rise up that made Tubby's mouth fairly water. He heaved many a sigh, as he waited for Rob to tell him that the first of his allotment was sufficiently browned to be devoured.

"Now, let's begin," said Rob finally. "Only look out not to burn your lips. And, Tubby, take my word for it, you're going to get the treat of your life!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ARMORED CAR.

"Honest, Rob, I never knew what I was missing when I said toasted frogs' legs would do for Frenchmen, but none for Merritt Crawford," and, while making this abject confession, the speaker allowed a look of sublime content to possess his features, such as would remove any lingering doubt concerning his sincerity.

"How about you, Tubby?" asked the master of ceremonies.

Tubby had been savagely tearing at his first helping. His eyes were glued on the various sticks under his charge, at the ends of which the rear portions of as many frogs were dangling, and turning a delicious brown under the influence of the heat.

Then Tubby was seen to heave a sigh.

"To think that there are only *six* more apiece!" he said in a most solemn tone. But the others

laughed softly, because they knew any loud merriment, under such peculiar conditions, was hardly safe.

"That settles one thing," remarked Rob. "There's going to be a marked reduction in the profits of this particular frog-raiser this season, if Tubby has to stay here long."

Tubby was already commencing on his second batch. He could not waste time in talking when his appetite had been excited to a feverish pitch by the first bite of tender and succulent meat.

"Only thing I kick about," he presently mumbled, throwing away the slender bones which he had picked clean, "is that they go so quick. Why, you hardly get started before you're at the end."

"That's the way with nearly all good things," Merritt informed him. "Just as soon as they become so numerous that you can have all you want, somehow it seems as if the craving leaves you."

"Yes, I guess that's about it," admitted Tubby, talking only because the next batch of provender was not quite ready for disposal. "Anyhow, I've

seen my mother just dote on a horrible little cucumber that dad brought home in January, paying about twenty cents for the same, and, when we have bushels of splendid ones in our own garden, why, nobody cares to eat them."

The little feast continued until everybody had cleaned up their mess. Tubby was disconsolate because the supply was so limited and the demand so great.

"How foolish we were not to double our catch," he said several times, "for there wouldn't have been any trouble about doing the same. One thing I've settled in my mind, I want to tell you."

"Well, go on, then, and explain," urged Merritt.

"I'll have one next summer, see if I don't," asserted Tubby.

"What—a feast of frogs' legs?" chuckled the other scout.

"Me? Only one show at the same? Well, when I like a thing, I rave over it. I want it every day. I mean to have a frog hatchery, and a pond where I can raise 'em by the million!"

"Listen to him, will you, Rob?" exclaimed Merritt, pretending to be horrified. "If ever there was a case where eyes were bigger than a stomach, it's right here. Millions of them, Tubby wants now; seven is only a flea-bite to him."

"Oh! shucks! don't make me out a hog!" remonstrated Tubby. "I didn't mean I expected to devour the whole lot. Why, can't you see there's good money in raising frogs? I'm going to get the figures, and find out just what the ratio of increase might reach. And my folks have got a dandy marsh on the old farm back near Huntington that we own. Rob, I thank you for opening my eyes to this grand opportunity. I expect it will be the turning point of my life yet."

They were used to hearing Tubby talk like this. He often became inspired with ambition, but, as time went on, the spirit died out, and something new took its place.

"You're letting the little fire die out, I notice, Rob," Merritt observed.

"Why, yes; we have no further use for it," he was told, "and there's always a small chance that some soldier would be sent this way on an

errand, when he might get a whiff of the smoke, and take a notion to investigate. For one I'm not hankering to be sent a prisoner of war to some detention camp on the Rhine."

"And I'd feel pretty bad if my mission over here turned out a fizzle," said Merritt, "because my heart is set on getting that paper for Grandfather Crawford."

"I'm going to propose," Tubby projected, as though he could not tear his thoughts away from the one fascinating subject as long as the taste of his remarkable feast was still on his lips, "that we put in a couple of hours' more work getting a supply of these bouncing big frogs. If the Germans stay right there the rest of the day we want to lay in some provisions; and our choice is limited, you know, to this one thing."

"Of course we could do that," Rob informed him, "in case it was absolutely necessary; but I've got a hunch that there's going to be a movement of that army before sundown. If that happens, we can get away from here, and find some one to cook us a meal."

"Then you must have noticed signs that told

they were beginning to get ready to go?" suggested Merritt.

"Which was just what I did," replied Rob. "I can hear certain sounds that tell me they have received the order they were expecting, and are breaking camp."

As all of them were anxious to learn whether this glorious possibility could be really true or not, they once more made their way back to the spot where their former vigil had taken place.

"Why, the whole army is in motion, seems like!" ejaculated Tubby.

"And a wonderful sight it is, at that," added Merritt. "They can say what they please about these German soldiers—and the Belgians feel they've got a right to call them all sorts of hard names, as barbarians and the like; but there never was such remarkable discipline in the history of the world. The huge army is like one vast machine. Men count only as necessary cogs. When one goes another takes its place, and the engine grinds on."

They crouched there and watched every operation from a safe distance. It seemed as though

there was a never-ending procession of gray-coated figures, most of them with the spiked helmets on their heads, marching away in columns toward the southwest. Then came batteries of quick-firing guns, and heavier field pieces. The clattering of accouterments, the neighing of horses, and the hoarse singing of various regiments—all these things came floating on the breeze to the ears of the three lads, as they lay there in the afternoon sunshine and watched.

"They seem particularly fond of certain tunes," remarked Tubby, "and I know one is the German national air, 'The Watch on the Rhine,' because we've sung it many a time in the school at Hampton. What's that other they roar out, Rob?"

"I think it's a popular patriotic German air, called *Deutschland ueber Alles,* which means, of course, 'Germany Over All'," Rob obligingly replied.

"Oh! well, every country's sons believe they ought to have the first place in the sun; and I reckon we Americans have done a heap of boast-

ing that way," Merritt remarked, which seemed to be about what Tubby thought, too.

So they lay there until the camp was entirely deserted. Never would those three scouts forget the spectacle to which they had been treated that day.

It was now along toward the middle of the afternoon. Far off in the distance somewhere, an action was certainly going on, for the grumble of heavy cannonading came almost constantly to their ears.

"Chances are," said Rob, as they prepared to vacate their refuge and once more push onward, "there's a fierce battle in progress, and this corps has received orders to get on the firing line. That would account for the way the troops were singing. Their business is to fight, and most of them are only happy when they can smell burnt powder, hear the crash of bursting shrapnel, and the heavy boom of big shells."

"We've seen one battle," observed Tubby with a shudder, "and for myself I'm not hankering after a second experience."

"I suppose in time we'd get used to such terri-

ble things," Rob pursued in a reflective way, "for even the fellow who nearly swoons away in his first fight, they say, becomes a regular fire-eater after a while; but, so far as I'm concerned, I'll be a happy boy when I see good old peaceful Long Island again, with its sandy beaches, and the familiar things we love."

"We all will, Rob," remarked Tubby fervently, a yearning expression coming over his rosy face, as in imagination he again saw the home folks, and sat down to a table that fairly groaned with the good things he doted on.

"Yes, after I've carried out my mission I'll be just as glad to start back as either of you fellows," Merritt assured them.

The last of the Germans had disappeared from view when the boys started out. Rob was looking a bit serious, and the other noticed that he kept turning his eyes off toward the right, for it was in that direction the great host had gone.

"You don't expect they will turn back and give us trouble, do you, Rob?" asked Merritt, noticing this frequent look.

"No; it isn't that," he was told, "but I'm won-

dering what a certain movement that I happened to notice could mean."

"Tell us about it, won't you, Rob?" Tubby implored. "It can't be that we have to take the same road that army marched away along, because we're heading in just the other quarter."

Before Rob could commence with his explanation they heard the sound of what appeared to be an automobile behind them. At the time they chanced to be at the foot of a slight elevation, which rose for perhaps twenty feet in a gradual ascent.

"Gingersnaps and popguns! Look what's bearing down on us, will you?" gasped Tubby.

"It's an armored automobile, as sure as anything!" added Merritt, "just like that car we saw in Antwerp, you know. Yes, I can see the muzzle of the deadly Maxim gun that's back of that metal shield. Rob, it's heading straight at us. What if they take us for Germans, and open fire?"

"Oh! for goodness' sake, let's wave a white flag to keep them from mowing us down like

wheat!" exclaimed Tubby, commencing to fumble in his pocket.

"Hold up your hands to show that we have no arms!" ordered Rob, abruptly. "They are Belgians, and perhaps the same daring fellows we saw come into Antwerp with all sorts of spoils to show they had made a raid, and shot down their regular allotment of the enemy. Yes, wave the white bag, if you want, Tubby; we don't mean to take any chances."

"It's a hard thing to be shot down, and then have some one say they're sorry, and that they didn't know the gun was loaded," remarked Merritt.

The armored car slowed down as it approached. Those vigilant Belgians aboard were doubtless observing the three figures in khaki closely. Already they must have discovered that they were Boy Scouts. Possibly they more than half expected to find they were Belgian scouts, for such boys were being used as dispatch bearers all over the war zone.

"We are friends!" called out Rob, "American boys, who belong to the scouts over in our coun-

"If you keep on the road . . . . you will fall into an ambush."—*Page 277.*

try, you understand? We have nothing to do with the war. Do any of you speak English? I can talk in French a little, if it's necessary."

The three Belgian soldiers laughed at that. Plainly they had been at a loss to place these three lads.

"I happen to be able to talk English very good," one of them called out, as the car stopped, "and we are glad to meet you. Americans are good friends of ours."

"Listen," said Rob impressively, "if you keep on the road you expect to take, so as to follow the German army corps, you will fall into an ambush inside of three minutes."

CHAPTER XXV.

TURNING THE TABLES.

When Rob made this astonishing statement his two chums suddenly realized that this must be the matter he had been on the point of explaining to them when the armored car from Antwerp came tearing along the road in their rear like a modern war chariot.

The leader of the three Belgian soldiers, and who seemed to be a captain, looked incredulous. He repeated what Rob had said to his backers, in Flemish; and they, too, observed the scout with wondering eyes.

"This is a strange thing you are telling me, boy," remarked the captain. "How is it you know there is an ambuscade laid to catch us napping?"

"I will gladly explain," the Eagle Patrol leader hastened to say. "You see, we want to get to Sempst, and, as we helped the Red Cross on the

battlefield yesterday, we were detained. Then we found that there was a German army camped right in our way. It moved off toward the front only an hour ago, and we have been hiding most of the day. But, while we were watching the troops depart, I was surprised to see a single gun taken into a patch of scrub on a little elevation that commands the road. It is pointed this way, and you can never notice it there unless you have been posted. Now I can guess what they are hiding for; they expect that you may be along, and mean to rid the German army of your stinging them so often!"

Tubby's mouth was wide open. He stared at Rob as though he hardly knew whether he were awake or asleep. Even Merritt seemed thrilled by what he had heard.

As for the Belgian captain, it was an incredulous look that gripped his features.

"I do not know what to believe, boy," he said, looking earnestly at Rob.

"The best way is to prove it," that worthy told him immediately.

"It would at least be convincing," the pilot of the armored car declared.

"Suppose, then," continued the scout, "you leave your car here at the foot of this little rise. They couldn't see us with that hump between. Go up the hill, and look along the road. You needn't let them see you, of course; but I notice that you've got a pair of field-glasses along. Follow the road with those until you come to a little break in the stone wall that lies around a patch of field on the right. It is this knoll I spoke of, crowned with brush. Watch that brush closely for a minute; perhaps you will see the sun glint from the gun; or else one of the hidden German gunners may move ever so slightly. That will tell the story, captain."

The pilot of the armored car jumped out.

"I will do as you say, at least it can be no harm," he remarked hastily.

After speaking in Flemish to his companions, he started up the rise, carrying the field-glasses and a revolver along with him. Watching, they saw him get down and crawl the last yard or so;

and then evidently he found a way to level his glasses in the quarter under suspicion.

Five minutes later and he backed off, coming quickly down the little declivity. The first thing he did was to grip Rob's hand and squeeze it fiercely.

"I have to thank you for my life, and the lives of my brave comrades as well!" he said with fervor.

"Then you found that what I told you was exactly so?" Rob asked.

"Yes, there is an ambuscade," replied the soldier. "They must have suspected that we would chase after the army so as to pick up stragglers, because that is our favorite game these terrible days; anything to sting the snake that is crawling across our beloved country and leaving death and destruction behind."

"You will not go ahead after learning what is waiting there, I suppose, Captain?" Rob continued.

"Certainly not, my boy, because they have the range plotted out, and, when we reached a certain spot, one shot would blow the car and the

three of us to pieces. Our play is to go around another way. But why have you done this for us, when you say, as Americans, you must be neutral?"

"I hardly know," replied Rob. "Up to lately we have not felt like favoring either side, because we have many good German friends at home. But what we have seen and heard here in Belgium is beginning to turn us to the side of the Allies. You see, I could not watch you rush right to your death, knowing what I did. Perhaps, if the tables had been turned I might have warned a German pilot to turn around before it was too late."

"Well, you have done us a great favor, and we thank you," said the Belgian soldier, with considerable feeling; after which he conversed with his two comrades for a minute or so, no doubt explaining what had awaited them close by; and that only for the timely warning of the Americans they would have been launched into eternity.

Then the car was turned around, and away the three dashing Belgians sped. The last the boys saw of them was when they waved their

hands back ere vanishing around a curve in the road.

"Well," said Tubby, "that was a splendid thing you did, Rob. And to think you noticed the Germans laying that cute little ambush there! It shows what training will do for a fellow, doesn't it?"

"It is only what every scout is supposed to do," replied Rob, thinking to impress a lesson on Tubby's mind. "Observe every little thing that happens, and draw your own conclusions from it. When I saw that gun going up into the field, I wondered what they meant by that. Then I saw they were laying a trap. I couldn't believe it was intended for us, and so I was puzzled, because we didn't expect to use that road at all."

"And when the armored car came whizzing along you knew the Germans meant to get the Belgians who had been doing so much damage day after day, as we'd heard; that was it, eh, Rob?" and Merritt nodded his head sagely, as though things were all as plain as anything to him now.

"Huh!" snorted Tubby, "after Columbus had

cracked the end of the egg and stood it up, didn't those Spanish courtiers all say that was as easy as pie? Course we can see things after they've happened. But you and me, Merritt, had better be digging the scales off our eyes, so we can discover things for ourselves next time."

Merritt did not answer back. Truth to tell he realized that he merited a rebuke for his lack of observation. It might pass with an ordinary boy, but was inexcusable in a scout who had been trained to constantly use his faculties for observation wherever he went.

"Our road will take us past that place where they are hiding, won't it, Rob?" he presently said. "Suppose, now, they guessed that we must have turned the armored car back, and lost them their victims, wouldn't they be likely to take it out on us, thinking we might be Belgian Boy Scouts?"

"I had that in my mind, Merritt," admitted Rob, "and for that reason I reckon we ought to leave the road right here. We can make a wide detour, and strike it further along, where the danger will be past."

All of them were of the same mind. They did

not fancy taking any chance of having that concealed six-pounder discharged point-blank at them. Mistakes are hard to rectify after a fatal volley has been fired. The best way is to avoid running any chances.

They found a way to leave the road and take to the fields, skirting fences, and in every way possible managing to keep out of sight of the German gunners who were lying concealed in that scrub on the little elevation.

It was while they were pushing on some distance away that without the least warning they caught a strange pulsating rattling sound from the rear. All of them came to a stop, and wondering looks were quickly changed to those of concern.

"Rob," exclaimed Merritt, "it comes from near where that gun lies hidden back of the bushes; and that's the rattle of a Maxim, as sure as you live. Those Belgians have turned the tables on the Germans; they've managed to sneak around back of them, and must be pouring in a terrible fire that will mow down every gunner in that bunch of brush!"

Rob was a little white in the face, as he continued to listen to the significant discharge. He had seen what mischief one of those Maxim guns could do at fairly close quarters, for they had witnessed them at work during the battle of the preceding day.

"I feel bad about it in one way," he said, "because in saving the lives of those three Belgians we have been the means of turning the trap on those who set it. But I never dreamed they would try to surprise the men in ambush."

The sounds died out, and silence followed; though the far-away grumble of the conflict could be heard from time to time.

"They've launched their bolt," said Merritt, "and either skipped out again, or else the German battery has been placed out of commission. We didn't hear the six-pounder go off, so they had no chance to fire back."

They continued their walk in silence. All of them had been much sobered by these thrilling and momentous events that were continually happening around them. Much of the customary jolly humor that, as a rule, characterized their

intercourse with one another had been, by degrees, crushed by the tragedies that they had seen happening everywhere among the poor Belgians and amid the stricken soldiers whom they had so nobly assisted on the field of battle.

Striking the little road again at some distance beyond, they continued to follow it, under the belief that they could not now be very far away from the town they were aiming to reach.

Before they entirely lost sight of the late encampment of the German army, the boys discovered that a number of peasants from the surrounding country had come on the scene, and appeared to be hunting for anything of value which might have been purposely or by accident left behind.

"The poor things know they're going to have the hardest winter ever," said Tubby, with considerable feeling in his voice, "and they're trying to find something to help out. Like as not some of them even came from Louvain, where they lost everything they had in the wide world when the place was burned to the ground. It's just awful, that's what it is. America looks like

the only place left where there's a chance of keeping the peace."

As they went along Rob was keeping track of their course. He gave Merritt his reasons for believing they would reach Sempst before sunset after all, unless something entirely unexpected happened to delay them again.

"Just now we're in great luck," he finished. "So far as we can see the Germans have cleared out of this particular section completely. They may be back again to-morrow; you never can tell what they'll do. But the main line of railroad is where they are mostly moving, because in that way they can get their supplies of men, guns, ammunition and food, and also take back the wounded. Some of their dead are buried, but in the main they prefer to cremate them, which is the modern way to prevent disease following battles."

Merritt did not make any remark, for he was becoming more and more anxious the closer they drew to the town where he expected to have that question of the success or failure of his mission settled.

Rob knew how strained his nerves must be. He could feel for his chum, and it was only natural for him to want to buoy up Merritt's sinking hopes.

"Don't get downcast, old fellow," he told him. "You've stuck it out through thick and thin so far. Whether you find this Steven Meredith in Sempst or not, you're bound to meet up with him somewhere, sooner or later, you know."

Merritt gritted his teeth, and the old look of resolution came across his face, which the others knew full well.

"Thank you for saying that, Rob," he observed steadily. "You know that once my mind is made up I'm a poor one to cry quits. I'll follow that man to China, or the headwaters of the Amazon, if necessary, but I'll never give up as long as I can put one foot in front of the other."

"And," said Tubby vehemently, "here are two loyal comrades who mean to stick to you, Merritt, to the very end."

CHAPTER XXVI.

FOR HUMANITY'S SAKE.

"I think we're coming to Sempst," said Rob.

It was nearly half an hour after Merritt had so firmly announced his intention of staying in the game, no matter if he should meet with a bitter disappointment in the town, which had been the loadstone for their advance through the heart of war-stricken Belgium.

"Then Brussels can't be very far away, over there," said Tubby. "Gee! I only wish we could find some scarecrows about now, and get a change of clothes."

"What makes you say that?" asked Rob. "I thought you were so proud of your suit of khaki that nothing could tempt you to give it up."

"Oh! I didn't mean I'd really want to discard this bully suit," Tubby hastened to explain. "Only if we could manage to conceal the scout uniform under something more common, why, you see the

Germans might take us for Belgian boys, and in that case wouldn't molest us."

"I understand what he's getting at, Rob," Merritt chuckled, "Tubby has said a number of times that the one thing he was sorry about was that we couldn't have a run through Brussels. Seems like he got a great notion he wanted to visit there, as he'd read a lot about the wonderful city. But you'll have to let that longing sleep until the next time you come abroad, Tubby."

"Unless we happen to find we've got business in Brussels," observed the other cunningly. "Then mebbe we might decide we'd find a way to go in. 'Course I mean if they told us here in Sempst that Mr. Steven Meredith, who seems to be a pretty smart secret agent of the German Government, had changed his residence to Brussels, so as to be in touch with army headquarters and the General Staff. How about that, Merritt?"

"We won't cross rivers before we come to them," Rob hastened to remark, not wishing the other to fully commit himself to any course. "After coming so far with the intention to find

our man here in this little town, it seems silly to get cold feet when we're right on the spot, and before we know anything that's against our having the best of success."

"Oh! you're right, Rob," agreed Tubby. "You remember the old motto we used to write in our copybooks at school long ago—'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' Guess that's from the Good Book, too; but it applies to our case, all the same. We'll wait till we see what is going to happen here in Sempst. Anyway, they haven't burned this little place down, because I don't see anything that looks like ruins."

Indeed, it seemed as though the peasants living close to Brussels had been induced by the Germans to continue their regular field work, under promise of purchasing for fair prices all the green stuff they could fetch into the capital. They, mostly women, old decrepit men, and children, for even the smallest could be given some task that would help out, were working in the fields.

"I wonder if any of them could understand my French," Rob was saying. "Of course it

wouldn't be likely they could talk English. I've got a good notion to try it on the first one we meet on the road ahead."

"Do it, Rob," urged Tubby. "Merritt and I will stand by to catch him if he starts to faint."

"Oh! I hope my French isn't quite that bad," exclaimed Rob. "I've been polishing it up considerable, you know, while on the steamer, and after we landed in Belgium; and, with what I know, and by pointing and shrugging my shoulders, I generally manage to make people understand. Of course, I don't know how it would be with a clodhopper who didn't happen to be as intelligent as I'd want. But here's a chance, and I'm going to make the attempt."

"It won't kill, even if it doesn't cure," said Merritt; "and, Rob, if you can get him to understand what you're saying, be sure and ask if that chemical factory, where we understood Steven had been given his responsible berth, has shut down, or if it is still in operation."

"I'll do that, Merritt," the other promised.

Accordingly, when the peasant, smoking his big pipe, came along in his wooden shoes, Rob

stopped him. He wanted to impress the fellow favorably, so as to increase the prospect for a favorable answer; and so Rob made sure to have one of his famous smiles on his bright face when he began to air his French.

The other boys stood there watching the "circus," as Tubby called it. They saw, however, that Rob, many times at a loss for words in order to express his meaning, must have managed to make the peasant understand him.

Again and again each of them pointed toward the town so near at hand. Possibly Rob may have been explaining just who he and his chums were, and also how they had come all the way from Antwerp with the one hope of finding a certain person in this little suburb.

"He's picking up some kind of news, seems like," Merritt told Tubby, as the dialogue progressed under so many difficulties, expressive movements of the shoulders, and waving hands taking the place of words that failed.

"What makes you think so?" demanded the fat scout.

"Look at Rob's face, and you can tell that he's

feeling more or less satisfied with the way things are going on," replied Merritt.

"Gosh! that's so," muttered Tubby. "Seems you're getting a move on, too, with observing things. I'll have to hurry and do something myself, if I don't want to find that I'm no first-class scout, after all, but only a dub."

Finally Rob was seen to press a coin in the calloused palm of the peasant, who took off his cap and bowed several times, as though grateful, and then he continued on his way along the road.

"What luck?" asked Tubby immediately; while Merritt, more deeply interested than any of them, silently waited to listen.

"Oh! he gave me quite some information," replied Rob; "and, so far as I can see, it looks good for us. I didn't learn anything about Steven Meredith, because the farm laborer probably never heard of such a person; but he did tell me that the chemical works have been kept going full blast ever since the Germans occupied Brussels."

"That must be because certain things are made there that they can use in their war game, eh, Rob?" Merritt conjectured, and the other nodded.

"No question about it," he said, "though the peasant couldn't say why certain things were done, only that they did happen. But, if the factory is running wide open, there seems to be a chance that we may find Steven still on deck, and keeping his finger on the pulse."

"I'm only afraid that if he really is what we think, a secret agent of the government," Merritt suggested uneasily, "that he may have been transferred to some other point where his smartness would be apt to count, perhaps away down in France, so that he could send up valuable information about the making of artillery, or how the conscription of the Nineteen-Fifteen boy recruits is coming on."

"Still, to find the works open, and doing business right along, looks like a piece of good luck to me," said Tubby.

"It is," added Rob positively. "We agreed long ago that we'd consider it such, if we learned there had been no shutdown. We hoped it would be that way, for we already knew that German capital had been back of the chemical works. I wouldn't be much surprised if it was learned that

somewhere about the place, unknown to most people, these clever Germans had long ago built a heavy concrete floor, to be used in their business; but which would make the best kind of foundation for one of those big siege guns they used to knock down the Liège and Namur forts."

When Rob said this he did not dream how closely he was hitting the truth. It had not been discovered at that time how secret preparations along such lines had been made by the Germans, year after year, in close proximity to many of the leading cities in Belgium, France, and even over in England.

"Well, now for moving on, and entering the town," Merritt remarked, with a look on his face that told how he was summoning all his resolution so as not to appear too heartbroken should they meet with bitter disappointment.

"I hope we don't run across any German soldiers here," said Tubby.

"We want to keep on the constant watch for them," Rob gave warning. "If they saw us, they might think it their duty to have us arrested at

once, and detained until our story could be investigated."

"And that would spell ruin for all our plans, wouldn't it?" Merritt asked, not as cheerfully as he might, because he had been fearful all along that something like this might come to pass just when he had discovered the object of his long search, and before he could proceed to relieve Steven Meredith of the old case in which he carried those splendid field-glasses.

They were now among the outer houses of the town. So far as they could see, Sempst did not differ to any degree from various other Belgian towns they had seen. It consisted of numerous small houses, a few more pretentious dwellings, possibly of Brussels business men, and some factories.

From only one of these stacks was smoke seen coming, and, having picked up a pointer, it was easy for the scouts to decide that this must be the German-owned chemical works with which Steven Meredith had been connected, between his foreign trips.

When thus entering the town that was so close

to Brussels, where the Germans were in full charge, it was the policy of the three scouts to draw as little attention to themselves as possible. While thus far they had not chanced to notice any German soldiers, still there was always a possibility that some of them were around.

Besides, Rob figured that if a German-owned chemical factory had been in operation here for years, very naturally there would be many natives of the Rhine country employed there, and living in the town. If the German government were really back of this Belgian works, as seemed possible, they would want to have mostly reliable men on guard, who, in case of sudden emergency, could throw off their workmen's garb and show themselves in their true colors, as regularly enlisted soldiers, serving their superiors while plying their regular trade.

When, therefore, the boys heard loud outcries, after entering the town, and made the distressing discovery that there was a runaway approaching them, the first thought Rob had was that they must keep out of the way, and not interfere, lest

by so doing they attract attention toward themselves.

With this discreet plan of action rapidly forming in his mind, Rob was even in the act of hastily drawing both his chums back behind a wall until all the excitement had subsided, when he made a discovery that brought his scheme to a halt.

It was, after all, only a pony that had been seized with an attack of blind staggers, and was now dashing frantically away, with a little basket-cart dragging back and forth at his heels; but in that cart Rob saw was a frightened child.

In that moment, Rob struggled with a grave question. To show themselves before a crowd such as would likely gather, was full of danger, not only to themselves, but for their mission as well. At the same time there was a something within his soul that refused to avoid the responsibility by shutting his eyes.

He could not do it. He knew that child was in deadly peril, for, small as the pony might be, just then he was acting like a little demon. If

he allowed the runaway to go by, and something dreadful happened, how could he ever reconcile his action with his vows as a true-blue scout?

So Rob's mind was made up.

"Merritt, we must save that poor little child, come what will!" he exclaimed; and that loyal comrade, forgetting all else for humanity's sake, instantly cried:

"We will, Rob! Hurry and get on one side, while I look out for the other!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

"Where do I come in? Won't you let me help?" bawled Tubby, hurrying after his two chums as fast as his fat legs would carry him.

Neither of the others paid the slightest attention to him. Just then Tubby was about as useless as a fifth wheel to a wagon. He was so clumsy that if he attempted to take a hand in the rescue work the chances were Rob and Merritt would have to spend a portion of their time in saving him.

They ran out into the middle of the road. The crazy little pony was already close up, and there was no time to be lost.

"Now!" shouted Rob. "Nab him, and throw him if you can!"

Both scouts fastened upon the bridle close to the bit. Every ounce of muscle the boys pos-

sessed was brought to bear, supplemented by all the shrewdness they had acquired upon the football field, in tackling and throwing the runner who held the coveted pigskin oval.

There was something of a struggle, and then down went the frantic pony.

"Hey! let me sit on him; I'll keep him quiet!" called Tubby, as he came panting up to the spot; and once he had deposited his extra weight upon the little beast, it had no other course open but to succumb to circumstances and lie quiet.

Rob turned to see what had become of the child. There was a stout, red-faced man, coming on the run as fast as he could hurry. Undoubtedly it was his child. While he was in a store, the pony probably had been taken with a sudden seizure of what Rob called "blind staggers," which sometimes causes horses to dash madly away as though possessed of an evil spirit, and even to destroy themselves against any barrier that arises in their path.

The child, though crying with fright, was apparently unhurt. Some one had taken her from the basket-cart, and should the pony have broken

loose again, it could not have imperiled the little one.

In another minute, the red-faced man was hugging his child, and covering her face with kisses. The people must have told him who had saved his darling, for he came up to Rob and Merritt. (The pony had now become quite calm, though Tubby continued to occupy his seat, for, as he afterwards said, "he knew a good thing when he found it; and he was *awful* tired.")

The big stout man, evidently a German, from his appearance and language, began to pour out his thanks; but Rob shook his head as he remarked:

"None of us can speak German, sir. We are American boys, you see; I can understand a little French, but that is all."

The man's face lighted up. He immediately seized Rob by the hand and commenced to kiss him on the cheeks; but the boys had learned that this was the common method of warm salutation abroad, even among men, though they had never seen it done across the water.

"I am glad you are American and not Eng-

lish!" the other went on to cry. "I would be sorry, indeed, if I owed the life of my little Frieda to an English boy. But an American, it is quite different. Ach! what would I not do to show you how grateful I am for your brave act? Tell me, can I not do something to prove that in Germany we look upon your country as our friends? My name it is Herr Frederick Haskins, I am the principal owner of the chemical works over yonder. Let me be your host while in Sempst you stay. It would give me much pleasure, I assure you."

Rob stared at Merritt, and the latter almost held his breath. Was there ever such great luck as this? They had saved a child from danger, and made a warm friend of her father, who had turned out to be the proprietor of the very factory where Steven Meredith had an interest outside of his occupation as a secret agent of the Kaiser.

"Rob, ask him!" whispered Merritt, too overcome himself to find words in which to give utterance to what was weighing so heavily on his mind.

So the patrol leader, mastering his inclination to feel just as "shaky" as Corporal Crawford, turned again toward the red-faced German chemist.

"We might accept your kind offer of entertainment for to-night, Herr Haskins," he said, as though they took the man's sincerity for its face value, "because we will have to put up somewhere, though to-morrow it may be we shall want to start back toward Antwerp again. You said that you were the proprietor of the chemical company in town. Are those the works where the smoke is coming out of the stacks?"

The man nodded. He held his little girl in his arm, as though he could not bear to let her be away from him again. A look of what seemed to be pride crept over his face; it meant something that his was the only factory that had been kept running, simply because his foreign hands did not have to go when the call to the Belgian colors came.

"It is because I have the confidence of the German government that I am allowed to con-

tinue my works," he said in a low tone, as though not wishing others to hear what he was saying.

"It is very strange," continued Rob, bound to learn the worst immediately, now that such a golden opportunity had come along, "but it was to see a man connected with your business that we came all the way from Antwerp. His name is Mr. Steven Meredith, who was over in America not so many months ago."

It was apparent that they were going to meet with a keen disappointment; Rob knew this the second he saw the shade of regret pass over the rubicund face of Herr Haskins.

"Ah! that is really too bad," the stout man exclaimed; "for you are just one week too late!"

"Has he left Sempst, then?" asked Merritt sturdily.

"Just seven days ago he shook hands with me, and said I could look for him when I saw him again. That might be in a month, and it might be six, even Steven could not say. He simply had to obey his orders from his superiors. His interest in the works is not the only thing he follows, you understand."

"No," said Rob, mysteriously, looking carefully around, as though he wanted to make sure he was not overheard, "of course we know his other business. The General Staff has ordered him again on duty somewhere. It is too bad, because my friend here wishes to see Herr Meredith very much, indeed."

"I am sorry," remarked the stout man, in a hesitating way, and Rob knew that if he hoped to get any information from this source at all now was the time to strike—while the iron was hot.

"You say you are grateful, sir," he hurriedly whispered, "because we happened to save your little girl's life, or at least kept her from being badly injured. We would call the debt canceled if you could tell us where we can find Herr Meredith. If he is in France, tell us where."

The man did not immediately reply. His face was a study. He was undoubtedly being torn between gratitude and devotion to the interests of his emperor, whom he would have died to serve, no doubt.

"If I could only be sure it was right for me to

give you that information," Rob heard him mutter, and he hastened to follow up his attack.

"I give you my word of honor, Herr Haskins," he said earnestly and convincingly, "that none of us has the slightest intention to betray Steven Meredith to his enemies. If you write down the information we need, we solemnly promise you not to use it to his injury. My friend only wants to get a small thing Herr Meredith has with him, although he himself does not know it is in his possession, for it was all a mistake about his taking it. He will be only too glad to give it to us, and we shall trouble him no more. Won't you take our word of honor, sir?"

The big man looked down at his child, and that must have decided him.

"Come home with me, and spend the night," he said in a hospitable way. "We will entertain you the best we can under the peculiar conditions existing here. If you care to, you can tell me all about yourselves; and I promise you that before you go to sleep this night I will place in your possession an address in Northern France where you will likely find my partner, *under an-*

other name. But you must swear to me that under no conditions will you imperil his position there. Is it a bargain, my boys?"

Rob looked at Merritt. The latter, although terribly disappointed, was still game. He gave not the slightest sign of submitting to the decrees of a cruel Fate.

"We will accept your hospitality, Herr Haskins," he said quietly, "and also take from you that address under the promise you ask. Steven Meredith has no reason to fear that we will betray him. We are Americans, and our President has asked that every one, old and young, remain strictly neutral while this war is going on."

"We bound up the wounds of three times as many Germans after the battle as we did Belgians," Rob added, while Tubby was heard to mutter under his breath:

"Which was because there were ten times as many Germans hurt as there were of the brave little Belgian army."

They accompanied Herr Haskins to his fine home, where they were splendidly entertained that night. Tubby ate so much dinner that he was

incapable of joining in the conversation that immediately followed, though that fact was of minor importance, because, as a rule, he only made himself a nuisance when there was any serious discussion on hand.

At least, if they had to be disappointed in not finding the man they had come so far to deal with, they could deem themselves lucky in meeting Herr Haskins under conditions that placed him heavily in their debt; otherwise they might never have discovered in what direction Steven Meredith had gone when his superiors in the German Secret Service ordered him on duty again.

As it was, when the boys on the following morning once more headed in the direction of Antwerp, armed with a letter from Herr Haskins that would be of considerable service should they be held up by any German patrol, Merritt also had a small bit of paper secreted inside the lining of his coat, on which simply an address was written.

As they journeyed they had plenty of opportunities to lay out their new program and build

fresh castles in the air concerning the success which they meant to attain if it lay in mortal power.

Whether they were as fortunate in the new fields that now stretched before them as they had been in avoiding pitfalls between the battle lines in Belgium, you will find recorded in the next volume of this series, under the title of "The Boy Scouts with the Allies in France."

THE END.

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